

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT



*A series of sermons by
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The Sermon On The Mount - Chapter 1

"The Salt Of The Earth"

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Matthew 5:1-16

We're turning in our Bibles to Matthew's gospel and chapter 5. You will remember, if you were here approximately a year and half or so ago, we spent about 12 weeks going through the Beatitudes that you find at the beginning of Matthew's gospel and chapter 5. I have felt led, I believe, of the Lord to continue that study of the Sermon on the Mount. We have done the Beatitudes, and I hope that we have understood what the Lord Jesus was teaching in those - but there was much more that He taught within the Sermon on the Mount. I want us, in the weeks that God would set before us, to look at this great sermon of the Lord Jesus Christ and see what He says to us in our own present-day.

We'll read the Beatitudes so that we can get the context of what the Lord is saying. Verse 1: "And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain: and when he was set, his disciples came unto him: And he opened his mouth, and taught them, saying, Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled. Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God. Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you. Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? It is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men. Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven".

I did announce on Thursday evening that we'd be looking at the subject of salt and light - and I misled Trevor a little there, because as I studied more and more into this passage of Scripture, particularly in verse 13, I found that there was too much to say on the subject of salt. So we're looking at the salt of the earth this morning and, God willing, the week after next - after Children's Day - we will look at the light that we're meant to be.

You will note in verse 10 that the Lord Jesus changed from addressing 'they' to, in verse 11, addressing 'ye'. He was speaking of those who were in Christ as being blessed if they fulfilled these things that we find in the Beatitudes. Then in verse 11 it seems that He takes His attention away from generalities, and speaks specifically to the disciples themselves, and says: 'Blessed are ye'. In verse 13 He continues on with that particular second person and says: 'Ye are the salt of the earth'.

We know that in the Beatitudes the Lord Jesus was not addressing the multitude, but as He preached this greatest of all sermons the multitude were not far from His thoughts - but specifically He was speaking to the disciples, the twelve whom He had called to follow Him. We learnt in that study of the Beatitudes that that teaching, those things that the Lord laid down that will make a man blessed in the eyes of God, specifically deal with the interior of a man. They deal with our heart. Of course, the backdrop to that great teaching of the Lord was the external legalism of Pharisaism. The Lord was opposing that in these teachings, showing that

this is true religion, this is the faith of God, and it is within the heart. It is in the interior. It's not as much taken up with externalities of man-made religion, but it is to do with our relationship toward God and toward men from the heart.

Now, the danger of just studying the Beatitudes is that we conclude therefore that this life of the Beatitudes can be lived in isolation. If we make that mistake it is a fatal one. To think that this great holy life can be lived [away] from a world that contradicts what we believe - but as we read verses 13 to 16, we find that it is the opposite that is the case, it is the opposite that is true. In fact, the Lord Jesus is saying that it is impossible to live these eight Beatitude characteristics in private. To show that to us the Lord Jesus Christ crowns them with two brilliant illustrations - to show that, as we have considered in the Beatitudes what we are, we must now consider what we must be in the eyes of men and women.

Someone has said that the believer is like a scuba diver in the ocean - he is out of his element in this present world system, because his citizenship is in heaven. That is a very apt illustration of our condition: we are not of the world, but we are in the world. We do not love the world, but we are called to be a witness to the world. So you have this seeming contrast within the word of God, of how we are to live holy lives, how we are to be godly in Christ Jesus and strive, by the Holy Spirit, to live a life that is pleasing to Him - yet it cannot, and it ought not, be in isolation to the world.

Of course that is illustrated beautifully in the life of our Lord Jesus Christ, for He had contact with the world without contamination from the world. Indeed, He was called the friend of sinners, yet the writer to the Hebrews goes on to interpret that He was also holy, harmless, undefiled and separate from sinners - and that is so refreshing, isn't it? To realise that these Beatitudes, spiritual principles, can be lived in the midst of an awful, sinful world - that it is a truth that true separation from the world can be without isolation from it! Hence the error of monasticism, where men and women lock themselves away from the world and isolate themselves, and subtract themselves and separate themselves from everything that this world is - how it is in total error about the mystery of what is in Christ, the great mystery of the gospel, the wonderful thing about this gospel of Christ, is that a holy life can be lived in the midst of a sinful world!

It is seen in the illustrations that the Lord Jesus gives us of what our lives ought to be within the world. They're conspicuous, aren't they? They cannot be missed - look at them, verse 13 to 16. He gives us the illustration of salt, then there's the illustration of light, then the third of a city set on a hill - they cannot be missed! Indeed His words contradict the growing concept today: 'Live a holy life, be a Christian, but don't broadcast it or bother anyone else with it'. The word of God teaches that the believer cannot display all these Beatitudes in splendid isolation from the world, it is just not possible!

Now, I want you to take yourself to the scene where the Lord speaks these words, and He says to His disciples - directly addressing them: 'Ye are the salt of the world'. I'm sure that perhaps some people in that gathering, in the multitude, might have thought it absurd to call them the salt of the earth. If you think of who they were: some of them fishermen, some of them terrorists, some of them publicans, and hated by all of society - and here is the Lord Jesus calling them the salt of the world. Literally in the Greek it means this: 'You alone are the salt of the world' - in other words He's saying: 'Out of the whole world you twelve disciples are the salt of it, and you alone!' That's remarkable, isn't it?

In the Old Testament the prophets were the salt of the land of Canaan, but now in the New Testament these apostles would be the salt of the earth. You know if you take a handful of salt in your hand, and put it all over your dinner - or maybe you can take it along a long road, those millions of grains of salt - one handful of them will have a tremendous effect, indeed, a widespread effect. When we consider the effect that the apostles had on our world, indeed they turned it upside-down, we can see how true it was that they were the salt of the world.

Now, salt in our society is taken for granted, but in the ancient world it was of great value. Indeed, I'm led to believe that Roman soldiers had salt rations, and they would revolt if the rations were changed in any way. The English word that we have 'salary' literally means 'salt money'. You've heard the saying that a man 'is not worth his salt', or that a man 'is worth his salt' - and really what you are saying is exactly what the ancient world said about salt: it is valuable, and we can measure a man's work by it.

So the Lord says to His disciples, and - because we are His disciples also - He says to you today: 'You are the salt of the earth'. What picture was He painting in that illustration? Well, the first thing I want you to note is the reason there needs to be salt - the reason there needs to be salt. If you go into the Old Testament, you find that the sacrifices there were never ever made with leaven. Leaven was symbolic, or typical, of sin - and never was leaven to enter into any sacrifice, but the sacrifices were always to have salt within them. Leaven is a picture of a corrupting force within the world, this antichrist system - but salt is seen to be something that is pure, something that is white, something that is holy and acceptable unto God. We find that right throughout the whole of Scripture, salt becomes emblematic of the covenant between God and His people. In ancient times, in the secular world, salt was symbolic of fidelity, of purity, of friendship.

But what I want you to see, in the light of what the Lord Jesus says here, is that scripturally salt is to be seen as a picture of spiritual health - spiritual health! Of course, the epitome of spiritual health is the gospel of Jesus Christ, isn't it? As we look all around us - unless we're blind in our sin, or blindfolded Christians - we cannot fail to see that there is decay all around us. Daniel, in his great vision, saw the meaning of the image. It was revealed to him the fact that political powers would decay, they would go from gold to silver to brass, and then to iron and then to clay. What he was seeing was this: history, started with clay in Adam - made from the clay of the ground - but history will end with clay, and all the great battlements, all the great empires and status symbols of men, will turn one day to dust again in the face of a holy and a wrathful God. We see that happening in our midst, we see the religious world is decaying - for Paul says that men have a form of godliness, but they deny the power thereof. The Lord Jesus Himself said: 'Nevertheless, when the Son of man cometh shall He find faith on the earth?'.

We are blind if we cannot see that we are in perilous times, we are in the times that Paul spoke of, we are in the end times - and when we think of the decay, and when we think of the subject of decay, after decay there comes a falling apart, and what we are seeing in our society today is a falling apart of everything around us! Marriages are falling apart, families are being broken up and scattered, law and order is laughed at. The basic institutions of our society are threatened near to extinction, and many of the structures that we see in our society, that look healthy from the outside, are rotting in the inside - and it is only a matter of time before they collapse and they fall around our ears! As one writer said: 'The corpse is rotting away, and the eagles are gathering together'.

Now, in that backdrop, you can see the need for salt, can't you? Can you see, in the tone of the Lord Jesus Christ, that He is saying - His motivation is - that it is criminal for a Christian disciple to isolate or insulate himself, and stand at the sidelines and wait for the great collapse of society? The contrast is that between Jonah and the Lord Jesus - what did Jonah do? He went outside the city of Nineveh and he sat down and he waited for the judgement and wrath of God to fall upon those people - but what did the Lord Jesus do? It says He went in and looked over the city, and He wept, and He wanted to woo them to Himself.

You have Abraham, who knew the corruption of Sodom and Gomorrah, yet he prayed that that city might be spared. You have Paul in the book of Romans who knew how blind Israel was, yet he was willing to be accursed that Israel might be saved. You can see Joseph in Egypt, you can see Daniel in Babylon, and all of those individuals in the midst of a decaying world that was falling apart around them, they were divine salt for good! Granted, their ministries did not prevent the ultimate collapse of the nations - but let me say this: they left everyone in those nations without excuse.

Now my friends, that is the need for salt, that is why we need salt - and we need to be salt in this world because of the awful corruption, depravity and sinfulness of this world system around us. Then we see, secondly, from this picture of salt that salt brings preservation: the preservation that salt brings. You will know, I'm sure, that in the ancient world there was no ice-making machines, there was no refrigeration, and the only way that they had to preserve meat was to salt it down and rub salt into it, or soak it down in a saline solution.

Do you believe humanity is rotting? Do you believe that? I hope you haven't swallowed the evolutionary philosophy that is channelled into children in school, and to us through the television and the radio and the newspapers, periodicals and magazines. We are continually bombarded by it: that humanity is getting better and better by the day - it is a lie! It is rotting, it is decaying, and that is why God had to destroy it with a flood - but I want you to note that after the flood they were as sinful as they were before the flood. Humanity does not, and cannot, change - and what the Lord Jesus was saying in verse 13 of chapter 5 of Matthew's gospel is this: 'Humanity without Me is a dead body, rotting and falling apart. You, My followers, are the salt of the earth that must be rubbed into the flesh to halt that decomposition'. He is saying that the Christian must be rubbed into the world.

He didn't say, as many modern Christians say: 'You are the sugar of the earth' - meaning gentleness and winsomeness without truth, not the offence of the gospel or the stumbling block of the cross. But what He was saying is: 'If you are to be the salt of the earth, you will be disadvantaged to be salt'. It will not be nice to be salt, because as you are rubbed into the world that salt will hurt the world. When God's people are amongst those who are raw towards God, their presence will hurt! You see the man that is without God, and is wrong before God, is like an open wound - and when you come in, and if you come in, with a holy and righteous life it will aggravate it, it will irritate him - the annoyance and distress he will feel will bring spite toward you and hate and persecution - hence the persecution in verse 11 and verse 12.

You see, that's why we're still here. Do you ever think about this? The reason why the Lord didn't rapture us as soon as we were converted is that we are to be here for the Holy Spirit is within us, we are the temple of the Holy Spirit, the church of the Living God, and through that Holy Spirit in the church He convicts the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgement to come. The reason why the world hated the Lord Jesus Christ, the reason why the world fed the Christians to the lions, is that if He, and if we, had not come and spoken unto them they had not had sin, but now they have no cloak for their sin.

Now my friends, let's be honest with this: are we being rubbed into the world? Are you? As Christians, have we saturated the world system, infiltrated it, in order to turn people away from the darkness of Satan unto the kingdom of God's glorious light? Do we work like a preservative, like an antiseptic on the effect of decomposing life? Do we rub life and soul into people around us, into the society that we live in, into the workplace that God has placed us in, in the family that we have jurisdiction over, are we salt within it?

Now you know as well as I do that there are certain people, and in their company you have to be spiritual. They have a preserving influence on you. But then there are other people, and when you're in their company you think nothing of dropping down the guard and saying something you know you shouldn't say, and talking in doubtful conversation. What that is simply illustrating to us is that salt has a preserving effect, it brings with us a precious, a holy influence on society. My friend, if we were what we ought to be, our influence on society would reduce the crime level, it would restrain ethical corruption, it would promote honesty, it would quicken the conscience of unbelievers, it would elevate the general moral atmosphere to an all-time high. Can you imagine what the presence of such salt in the military would mean, in business, in education? But the antithesis of that is that if their presence is not there, and if the Christian is not rubbed into the midst of the world: all we do is hasten the surprising levels of depravity we see around us today!

You see the truth is this: we are meant to be unlike the world, and salt is essentially different from the world - and that is why, when it is rubbed in, it has a preserving effect.

Thirdly, the illustration the Lord gives us is that salt has a savouring influence - the savouring that salt gives. You will know that salt flavours things, and certain foods without salt are insipid, maybe even sickening. What the Lord Jesus is saying is: Christianity is to life what salt is to food. Oliver Wendel-Holmes (sp?) once said this: 'I might have entered the ministry if certain clergymen I knew had not looked and acted so much like undertakers'. You can laugh at that if you want! Robert Louis Stevenson said once, in his diary after going to church, and it seemed to be an extraordinary phenomenon - he wrote: 'I have been to church today and I am not depressed'. The perception of the world is that we are the opposite of salt upon life, isn't it? That we are not the savour and the flavour of life, but we are that insipid tastelessness, and unsavouriness of life. We seem to hinder everything that is pleasure, but all the Lord is saying to us is: 'Ye are the salt of the earth, and you must discover once more that lost radiant flavour of the Christian faith'. He is saying: 'In a worried world the Christian should be the only one who remains peaceful. In a depressed world the Christian should be the only man or woman who remains full of joy!'

Do you have a savouring influence on those around you? Do you? Do you have a positive influence? Do you exude aura that life without Christ is insipid and is dull? That's not what our culture teaches us, our culture attempts to numb itself with pleasure and with drugs, and with a pleasure-mania - and people are literally dying of boredom around us! The entertainment industry thrives on making life look better, on making it more fun and luxurious - and good within it is often portrayed as evil, and evil as good. Evil is seen to be more exciting than good, isn't it? But that is a lie! Young people, whatever you do, don't believe that lie!

The truth of God is this - do you believe this, Christian? Think about this: that holiness is more exciting than sin. Can you think of the influence that we would have on society if we were more courteous, if we worked harder, if we produced the best musicians and artists and craftsmen and students? But fourthly - and I do want to finish this message with you today - there is a thirst that salt causes, a thirst that salt causes. Jesus made people thirsty for God! You see that, don't you? He attracted people to God, He repelled the Pharisees and the legalists, but the ordinary sinners, the ordinary people were attracted to the Lord Jesus. Now the question is too obvious: do we make people thirsty for Christ?

You know from taking one slurp of your soup, or one bite of your dinner, whether it's been salted or not - don't you? The question is: when people take one bite of us, do they taste Christ? There is a thirst that salt causes, and then fifthly the Lord Jesus says there's useless salt. Now, please look at this - verse 13: 'If the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted?' - if the salt becomes tasteless. Now today the salt that you have on your dinner table when you go home, chemically speaking, it's been refined so many times that it's impossible for it to lose its saltiness - it's an extremely stable substance, it can't become tasteless. But in Palestine, the type of salt that they had could be diluted, or even adulterated - so if you came along and put a load of water in the salt, and mixed it all up, that wasn't good enough to preserve meat. Or perhaps there was some sand mixed in, or soil, or dirt, mixed in with the salt - and it wasn't pure. So the salt could be diluted, or it could be adulterated - and either one of those two things would do one thing: it would make the salt lose its preserving influence.

Someone has said: 'If we are not affecting the world, the world is affecting us'. Are we exporting or are we importing? Are there greater influences coming into the church than going out of the church? If we are not salting the world, do you know what it means? The world is rotting us! Matthew Henry said: 'Salt is remedy for unsavoury meat, but there is no remedy for unsavoury salt'. Now please don't dilute the words of the Lord Jesus Christ, because He says: 'If the salt', and the salt is the believer, 'If the salt has lost its savour, there's nothing can be done!'. It is to be thrown out and trodden under foot of men! Why does He say that? Because if the salt is adulterated or diluted - the purpose of the salt to fight deterioration, it has been deteriorated

itself, and that purpose is lost! Do you know what He's speaking of? Uselessness - and He says that uselessness invites disaster.

Do you know something? There are some substances and when they become useless for one thing, they can be useful for another. You think of grapes: you have a lovely bundle of grapes on your table and they're there primarily, the greatest thing is for your refreshment, but when the grapes rot what do you do? Well they can't be used for your refreshment, but if they're sweet grapes you can plunge them and make them into wine - or if they're not sweet enough for the wine, then you can make them into vinegar - and if they're not even good enough for vinegar, you can use them as fertiliser to fertilise other vines and make more grapes! There are many uses for many things that become useless - but let me say this: there is no use for salt that becomes unsavoury! For it is cast out and trodden under foot of men in the street - the street was the rubbish dump of Palestine. Do you know what the Lord Jesus is saying, and do you know what the message is to you today? Are you a rubbish Christian? Are you?

There is a need for salt. The Lord asks: 'How will it be made salty again?'. Do you know why I know that there are rubbish Christians, and do you know why I know that those rubbish Christians are thrown out on the street and trodden under foot of men? Well, one reason is the nation of Israel. The nation of Israel! And the second reason is: you can search all of Asia Minor for all the great churches that you find written in the word of God, and you'll not find any of them! Why? Go to North Africa, look for the church of great Augustine - you'll not find it! Why? Because they lost their salt, and they were thrown out and trodden under foot of men.

My friend, I've so much to say to you, but I want to end on this note: in a country like ours, and a city like ours, that claims such a high density of believers, why do we have so little influence? Why? Perhaps in the last 50 years or more they've done more for peace, they've done more for social matters, and influenced society politically and every other way that you can imagine - but I believe that we have entered into a new dark age. Spiritually we are in another Dark Ages - and the only way to get out is if we prevent it! Am I placing too much responsibility on man? No! Christ said: 'You are the salt of the earth. You are the preserving influence. You are the savouring factor to society. You are the one that will rub life into this world'. He tells us that we need again to find our saltiness! That will only happen when we live a holy life, and that holy life is brought into contact with a dying, decaying, depraved world.

Let us pray, and as we bow our heads - we heard recently about a 'Blue Moon' service, and you know it grieves my heart that - as far as I can tell, and many in this assembly - there are some here today and the only thing that makes you Christian is the fact that you come and warm a seat on a Sunday. My friend, that is not what a Christian is - a Christian is the salt of the earth. My question to you is: have you lost your savour? For you need to beware that you're not thrown out.

Father, these are hard sayings. They do not comfort us, but they trouble us - but one thing we do know is this: we want to be what He wants us to be. We want to be holy, we want to make a difference in the home and in the school, in the University and in the workplace. We want to be the salt of the earth, and we pray that through us that You would overflow Your blessing to a dying world. In the Saviour's name we pray, Amen.

The Sermon On The Mount - Chapter 2

"The Light Of The World"

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by Pastor David Legge
Matthew 5:14-16

Now we're turning to Matthew's gospel again and chapter 5, to the Sermon on the Mount. The week before Children's Day, last week, we looked at the subject of 'The Salt of the Earth' and how we, as believers, are to be the salt of the earth - and that is the name that the Lord calls us. Now we're turning to the second illustration in those verses of scripture, from verse 14 to 16 of chapter 5 - let's read that together.

The Lord speaks again: "Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven".

The very first word of verse 14 is the word 'ye' or 'you'. It is astounding even to read that word at the very beginning of this statement of the Lord Jesus: 'You, yes, you are the light of the world!'. What an astounding statement! In fact, I think it's one of the greatest statements that our Lord ever made, because He stands among this company of people and specifically His own twelve disciples, and says to them: 'You are the light of the world'.

Once that was a title that was given to the nation of Israel. You will remember, in Deuteronomy chapter 26, God said to His own people Israel: 'The Lord hath avouched thee this day to be his peculiar people, and to make thee high above all nations which he hath made, in praise, and in name, and in honour; and that thou mayest be an holy people unto the Lord thy God, as he hath spoken'. But we see, as we enter the New Testament, that that great privilege that the people of God occupied, Israel, had been removed from them - and, if you like, in light of verse 13 they were salt that had lost their savour, they had been cast out to the street and trodden under foot of men. Now, in verse 14, the Lord removes that privilege from Israel and now gives it to His own disciples. Israel, who had once been a light in the world to all the Gentile nations, that privilege was being taken off them, they were now in darkness and the Lord Jesus' disciples would have to illumine them!

As we read the New Testament we see that Christ came not just to trim the wick of the old lamp of Judaism, but He came into the world to raise up new lights, new luminaries, in the church of Jesus Christ. Christ's disciples now would be the salt, the remedy, against human corruption. But now we see, in verse 14, that they would be the light against human ignorance - and just as the Lord Jesus Christ had come into the world as God's Sun of righteousness, as the Light of the world, now He turns to His disciples as He anticipates leaving the world, and He says: 'You are the light of the world'.

That is the first thought that I want to bring to you today, that you are light in this dark world. You are light in this world's darkness! If you were to turn to John chapter 3, you would see there in verse 19 that this world is shrouded in the deepest, depraved, degraded darkness that you can imagine. The Lord Jesus as a commentary upon that says: 'This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil'. Darkness is one thing, but intentional darkness is quite another. It is one thing to be subject to darkness, it is another thing to choose to shelter underneath it.

This world that we live in has chosen darkness rather than light! The world, I believe, reasons very much like Lady Macbeth when she said: 'Come thick night: And pall thee in the dunnest smoke of hell: That my keen knife see not the wound it makes, Nor heaven peep through the blanket of the dark'. They long for the darkness of this world to cover over their evil deeds, and blind the almighty, holy God from their depravity.

Of course, we know from the book of Genesis that the original state of nature was one of darkness, and it took the act of God coming in and saying: 'Let there be light', to bring light into it and to bring life to it. Human nature is the same: it is in deep, dense darkness. It is ignorant of the attributes of God, it is ignorant of the character of God, it is ignorant of its own state before a holy and a righteous God, it does not recognise its duty toward God - to glorify Him and to enjoy Him forever - and it does not recognise, it is blind to, the destiny of all sinners if they do not come repentantly to God.

For the average man death is a leap into the dark, isn't it? He doesn't know where he's going to - and indeed, it seems that when man boasts about his darkness, and the darker he seems to admit himself to be, the greater he is in the eyes of men, the wiser he is! When a Professor stands up, or a theologian nowadays, and says: 'Well, we just can't know, we just can't be sure. You have your belief, and I have mine, but we can't be absolutely sure' - and they pull this shroud, this veil of darkness, over the truth of God - why? Because men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil.

This darkness is a spiritual darkness that is deadly. Just as you're liable to fall and hurt yourself in natural darkness, just as you drive along the road and if you have no headlights - or there's no lamplights along the road - it's very dangerous to do so. Like a vessel out on the sea, and perhaps it has no lights, perhaps it has no navigation system, and perhaps there are no lights to guide it into the harbour - it is very dangerous! It could hit the rocks, it could hit another vessel. The Lord says we are the light of this world - isn't that remarkable? A world that is shrouded and has been plunged into the deepest darkness, Christ says to you and I: 'You are the light of the world. You are the luminaries, you are the guides, you will be the help of this world, you will be the ones who will deliver this world'.

I think that this is, perhaps, one of the greatest compliments that were paid ever to Christians: that Christ calls them - in John 9:5 He calls Himself: 'I am light of the world' - and now here He says: 'You are light of the world', and He calls His disciples by the very same name He calls Himself! All He is saying when He does that is: 'I want you to be like myself'. That's a big request, isn't it? To be like Christ as He was the salt of the earth, to be like Christ as He was the light of the world, to be like Jesus. It may be all you ask, but it's a big thing to ask isn't it? If Christ had not called us the light of the world, and we called ourselves that, it would be the height of arrogance - wouldn't it? It would be the height of presumption to think that we could say: 'We are the people, the light of the world' - but here is the Lord, standing with His disciples, and He wants to bring to their attention that there is a great need for light in this darkened world.

I don't know about you, but there are times that I despair because of the dense darkness of the age in which we live. Do you not? Are you not sometimes beside yourself as you think of what is going on in our nation at this moment, in our world? But you know, the lighthouse would laugh at us, because he has more sense than we have - because he realises and knows that it is needed all the more in the darkest of places, that's where light needs to be! What a privilege! That's what it is - it ought to be exciting to think that we are light in perhaps the darkest hour of history that there has ever been! In Philippians 2, in his day Paul said: 'In the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, you are to shine as lights. You are to be my light in a darkened world!'. It's more than simply reflecting the light of the Saviour, the inference of the statement is: we actually become light ourselves! We become the light of God.

In Ephesians 5 and verse 8 Paul said: 'For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord'. He doesn't say 'You were sometimes in darkness', he says: 'You were darkness' - and not 'now you are in the light', but: 'you are the light of the Lord, therefore walk as children of light'. Now, of course, our light is

derived from the Lord Jesus - of course it is! But, you know, isn't it a great mystery to think that although it is from Him, somehow it becomes ours - even though we don't contribute one individual ray to the light that we have, the church of Jesus Christ becomes that light!

If you think about it for a moment, if we are the light of the world we ought to do what light does naturally speaking. Light reveals things as they really are. I'm sure you've had the experience of fumbling into a home late at night and it's dark, or maybe you've been into a house that you've never been in before, and you don't know what to expect - and it's not until you turn the light on that you see the layout of the room. When light is shed on a situation, it shows things as they really are.

Light also promotes life. Indeed, I am told that even our broken bones flourish and mend better in the light, in the sun and in the heat. Light is persistent, natural light is - it goes into the deepest and the smallest little crevices all over nature, into the slightest crack, light will flood into the darkest place. Light awakens - I don't know whether you've ever been up at about half past four in the morning, but if you are you will hear what light does. You will hear the birds singing, you will hear all of nature awakening, because light awakens things. We are to be light in this dark world.

But the Lord says a little bit more than that, because He's emphatic in the statement He makes. This is my second point: you must let your light shine! It's alright being light, but you've got to let that light out! You've got to shine your light! Now, in a Biblical context, the Gentiles - if you like - lived down in the valley, they were the dogs, they had no thought of God, they didn't seek after God, they worshipped idols and they were pagans and idolaters and filthy sinners - down in the valley. Then the Israelites, they lived on the plain - if you like - they were higher, they had the God of Israel, they followed the ten commandments, the law of God, they were the chosen people of God. But now we are going from the valley, to the plain, to an even higher scale: we're going to the church of Jesus Christ. They are to be a people set upon a hill, because they have believed in Messiah. They have been elevated, they are one with Him, justified by His righteousness, possessed by His Spirit. Israel on the plain is made a possessor of earthly blessings in earthly places, but the Christian - the disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ - becomes a recipient of spiritual blessings in heavenly places.

It may be more desirable to live in a place that we are not in public view. It may be more comfortable to be in a place where we are a secret disciple, but the Lord Jesus is saying - verse 13, 'the salt of the earth', verse 14, 'the light of the world' - that is impossible! 'If you want to be My child you must let your light shine, you must be like a city set on a hill, you must be like a lamp on a lampstand giving light to all of the house. I have forbidden', He says, 'I have forbidden that you hide your light!'. What the Lord Jesus is saying is there is a great deal expected of sons and daughters of God. You can't hide your temper, you can't hide your character, you can't hide your demeanour, you can't hide your actions, you cannot hide your word - therefore in your words, in your actions, in everything that you do and are publicly, show yourself to be a son of God!

Now, in the illustrations that the Lord gives that we must that our light shine, there are four things that I want to outline from them. The first is this: He is saying your light must be visible. Look at the two illustrations He gave, verse 14 and 15. He talks of a city set on a hill for all to see. He talks of a lamp set up upon a lampstand. Now you know that there is no way, at all, to obscure a city on the crest of a hill - and I believe the Lord, perhaps, was turning and looking actually to a literal city by the side of Him up on a hill. You can't hide it, it's meant to be seen. If you think of a lamp - and remember that the houses in Palestine were very dark, they had no electricity, they had only perhaps one circular window not more than 18 inches long. All they had was a little lamp like a sauce-bowl filled with oil, and a wick floating in it. Normally they put that lamp in a high place, so that it had the greatest effect in all the house, so it spread everywhere. Perhaps they were going a message down to the shop, and they didn't want to put the lamp out, so they would put a bushel over it - a measuring bushel - to cover over the light.

What the Lord is saying is: a city set on a hill, a light on a lamp stand - that the primary duty of light is to be seen, do you get it? That, therefore, is what He's saying to you: you have got to be seen as a Christian, as a believer. Christians are meant to be seen - and as one person says: 'There can be no such a thing as secret discipleship - for either the secrecy destroys the discipleship, or the discipleship destroys the secrecy'. It's a contradiction! You can't be a follower of Christ and no-one knows about it! You notice He didn't say: 'You are the light of the church'. He said: 'You are the light of the world'. It must be visible.

Secondly: it must be effective. The sense of the lamp being put on a lampstand is so that it could light up - indeed, as the Lord says - give light to all the house. That's why He said: 'Don't put it under a bushel. Don't cover it up'. In Luke 11 He says: 'Don't put it in a vault. Don't put it down in the basement'. Although it may shine in a secret place, there are no people in that place for it to affect. It's got to be elevated, it's got to be put to a sphere and a place where it can affect other people - and the sphere of light that is given in verse 14 is the world! Look at it: 'You are the light of the world'. Isn't it wonderful to imagine that when you put a pound into your missionary box, that can be a beam of light to a little child in Africa? Isn't it? When you get onto your knees and pray for young boys and girls and adults in China, under persecution for their faith, that you can actually be shining the light of God round a world that you cannot possibly get to!

But I want us to see, specifically, from verse 15 that the Lord says that that light set upon a lampstand is to send light to the house - to the house. One author says: 'The light that shines the furthest, shines the brightest near at home' - isn't that true? Paul said to Timothy: 'Learn first to show piety at home'. I think this is the need of the hour - there are many things that we need to do, but there's one thing that is needful for our families, and that is to be the light not just in the church, but in the home. There's many a person comes into the church and they are the light of the church - and sometimes their over-piety and over-pious nature in the church is often over-compensating for a lack of holiness in the home! The Lord is saying: 'You've got to be a light where the sphere is your family, where the sphere is your home, where you affect your neighbours, where you affect your work colleagues. If you're not that light, you're useless!'.

Christians - this astounds me, you know - Christians are meant to be the world's real standard. We are meant to be the ones, like a thermometer, that show to the world around us what is right and what is wrong. Now, you know about this - I hope - from experience, that the facts speak louder than the words. Because you ask a man a question: 'Is that right, or is that wrong? Is it right to go there? Is it wrong to do this or that?' - the reply may come: 'Well, it is wrong because so-and-so is a Christian and they don't do it'. Isn't that true? But what is happening today is: when men are asked is this right or is this wrong, the sad reflection upon our holiness today is that they license people in going to sin because believers are doing it!

Whether we are comfortable with it or not, we must realise that many in the world observe Christians to know what is right and wrong - and that's why they often are the ones to point out when we are inconsistent. Isn't that right? They are the first to point the finger, why? Because they are looking, for we are the light! If this is the case, and I believe it is, we can't afford to take our standards from tradition or take our standards from each other - we must learn of God, we must look to the light, and we must also realise that when we dabble in the pleasures and sinful practices of this world, the line of demarcation becomes blurred and we're not any longer taking the light to the world but we're borrowing their darkness!

We are to be a guide to the world. You know the Lord Jesus Christ was that in Mark 7 verse 24, for it says that: 'He entered into a house, and would have no man know it: but he could not be hid!' It's like trying to hide sprayed perfume, to try and hide the fragrance of a Christ-like life within you! That's what we need today: a life hid with Christ cannot be hid from others. I hope you've noticed that - I know people and they're like that: they stand out among the rest. They're maybe not always the most gifted people, or the most wealthy, or the most influential, but they have a landmark life - they have a life that you can look to and say: 'There is a holy man, there is a holy woman'.

The challenge is 1 Thessalonians 1 verse 6, where Paul says: 'Ye became followers of us, and of our Lord'. That's a wonderful statement. Do you know what that is saying? Put it in our situation, ask the question: if the men and women outside this Hall became followers of us, would they find themselves being followers of Christ? Would they find that we are the light of the world, following our Christ, our Lord who said: 'I am the light of the world'? Are we people - oh, that God would make us people who others could point to and say: 'Now, that is a Christian!'.

It must be visible, it must be effective, and thirdly it must be unhidden. Normally men would not put light under a bushel, but isn't it strange that what they wouldn't dream of doing in the natural sense, in the spiritual they so often do? The believer often puts his light under a bushel. Do we hide our light? The question we must ask first of all, if we are hiding our light, is: is it light at all? Lloyd-Jones said: 'If we find in ourselves a tendency to put the light under a bushel, we must begin to examine ourselves and make sure that it really is light - for Christians are meant to be visible'. Like Christ in that house: we cannot be hid! Salt in the earth, making an irritation to an unholy and adulterous generation. A preserving influence, as the world decomposes, that we are the ones who stand up and are counted, and attempt by the Spirit to stop the rot. But we often put our light under a bushel.

Sometimes it's the bushel of cowardice, like Joseph of Arimathea. He had been lit, he had been a candle lit by the Lord, and no-one would have known it for he busheled his light - and it's recorded in the word of God, listen: 'He was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews'. What about in the workplace? What about on the street? What about your next-door neighbour? Do they know that you're child of God? Or if you told them that you were a child of God would they be astounded because of the life that you live?

Sometimes it's the bushel of apathy. Paul said: 'If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost' - that are lost! I think that the most dreadful thing that has ever happened in our society today, and within the church, is that that word 'lost' has been emasculated! We no longer realise what it means to be lost - and if we don't realise that, that's a bushel over our light. It makes us apathetic to the lost, we become unmoved at the millions who are Christless and on their way to hell! Let's face it: we are desensitised to the lost, and to the reality of hell. How do I know that? Well, we live in a society that kills it's unborn, and it doesn't bother us at all - isn't that right? Millions of little babies are cut up in the womb on the NHS* - and that desensitises us to death and to hell.

(*National Health Service)

There's the bushel of silence. You remember Lot - how do I know that Lot was silent? Do you know why I think he was silent? Because when he spoke to his family about Christ and God, it says he seemed as one who mocked - 'You're speaking about God? That's rich coming from you!' - and that can be a bushel upon our light. Because we're fearful we've been silent so long, but my friend can I urge you - in the light of the judgement seat of Christ - to take the bushel of silence, cowardice, apathy, away and to let your light shine!

Then there's the bushel of inconsistency. One man put it well: 'Your actions speak so loudly that I cannot hear what you say'. There was once a story told of a shipwreck off the coast of Florida. The storm came by night and it was so fierce that the howling wind came to the lighthouse and actually broke one of the windows of the lighthouse, and the wind was going to blow out the candle. Therefore the guard of the lighthouse climbed up and he put a bit of tin in the place where the window should have been. There was a great vessel that was coming at the aspect of where that piece of tin was, and they couldn't see the light of the lighthouse and they crashed into the rocks - what was the reason? There was one specific aspect of the life of that lighthouse where the light was not shining! It was blind. Sometimes one of our sides are inconsistent - and, you know, that causes awful damage.

Fourthly I want to ask question: how can I shine more? You've listened to this, perhaps you're wanting to shine visibly, shine effectively, shine in a way that you're not hidden by cowardice and apathy and silence and inconsistency - well, here's the answer! Donald Gray Barnhouse explained it this way, he said: 'Christ was in the world, and when He was in the world He was the shining sun that is here in the day and is gone at night. When the sun sets the moon comes up, and the moon is a picture of the believer or the church, because the moon reflects the light of the sun!' It doesn't shine with its own light, it shines with a reflected light.

How can we shine? A man on one occasion went camping with his wife, and brought a matchbox with him. When they bought it there was little sign that said on it that it glowed in the dark. When they turned the lights out in the tent, they were going to test it out - and they went to strike a match, but they couldn't find the matchbox because it didn't glow in the dark. When the wife took the torch and looked at the writing down the side of the matchbox, she found written in French these words: 'If you want me to shine in the night, keep me in the light'. If you want me to shine in the night, keep me in the light.

We need, more than ever, in a dark and a sinful world to keep and expose ourselves to the light of the world, Jesus Christ - and then we will become the light of the world, looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith. The face of Jesus Christ is where that glory shines: 'But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord' - look to Him! Bathe in His light, spend much time in prayer and in the word of God, and in fellowship with God's people - be under the shadow of God's light!

Thirdly and finally I want you to see that your light will reflect upon another. Look at verse 16 as we close, verse 16: 'Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven'. That word 'good works' means attractive things, things that don't repel people, but things that attract people to the Lord Jesus Christ. If you are being good - not in a theatrical sense, not to impress people or to win friends, but you are being good for God - it will glorify God! Some of us, you know, we're good to get a pat on the back from men.

Dr Alexander MacLaren said: 'Candles are not lit to be looked at, but that something else might be seen'. You're lit, my friend, hopefully with good works - not that you should be seen, but that God should be seen, that His glory should be seen. Like John the Baptist, who said: 'I must decrease, but He must increase' - he was saying: 'Don't look at me, look at God'. We are the sons of God, but we only reflect the light of God - and you can see that in his life, because it says not that he was a shining light, but it says of John the Baptist: 'He was a burning and a shining light' - it cost him! He was burnt up being a light unto the world.

Can I say, as we close, that in our nation: prison reforms, medical care, control of a perverted and perverting alcohol trade, abolition of slavery, abolition of child labour, the establishment of orphanages, the reform of the penal code - all of those areas of social reform were spearheaded by men of God! George Whitefield, John Wesley, Howel Harris, Lord Shaftesbury, William Wilberforce and others - at a time when the church, in those days, was a full moon dazzling the world with the light of the Lord Jesus Christ - I believe at this moment of time it is only a thumbnail moon with very little light that shines on the earth. We have got a challenge, my friend, the challenge is that in the densest of darkness - if we live a life that is pleasing to Christ - we can light this world! Will you take the challenge? Listen to the words of the Lord Jesus: 'You are the light of this world'.

Our Father, we thank Thee for the Lord Jesus who is that ultimate light of the world - but we are called by Him to be that light now that He has gone to heaven. We pray, Lord, that Thou wilt help us and give us grace to be cities set on a hill that cannot be hidden, to be candles put on a candlestick that will light our houses, our homes, our workplace, and - yes - our assembly, and all that we come into contact with may be lit by our light. We pray in all these things that our light may shine before men, seeing our good works, and they may

glorify Thee. Lord, that is what we long for - our ultimate prayer is that Thou should be glorified in our holy lives. So hear us Lord, and help us, in the Saviour's name we pray. Amen.

The Sermon On The Mount - Chapter 3

"Exceeding The Scribes And Pharisees"

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Matthew 5:17-20

Matthew chapter 5 again, the Sermon on the Mount. Please do make yourself comfortable, it's very very warm, and I want you to get through this meeting awake! So let's turn to Matthew chapter 5, and these are very difficult words that we're going to read together today - they are the words of the Lord Jesus Christ.

He says: "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven".

I've entitled my message today: 'Exceeding The Scribes And Pharisees'. What we have just read are some of the most difficult verses in the whole of the word of God. But as we read them and study them today, we must note that they are an introduction to what will follow within the Sermon on the Mount in the weeks that lie ahead.

The backdrop to these words was the perception of the Scribes and the Pharisees of the Lord Jesus Christ. Not who He was, or what He stood for, but what they perceived Him to stand for and the threat that they perceived Him to be. As far as they were concerned the Lord Jesus Christ was a destroyer of the law. He was a threat to what they called, and was they understood to be, the law of Moses and the law of God. As you read through the Gospels you find that to be so, because the Lord Jesus healed the sick on the Sabbath, it appears that He abolished the food laws that we find within the law of Moses. As far as they were concerned He was a destructionist, a revolutionist - He was one who was bringing a new teaching into Judaism, and He was trying to break the old ties with the past. They saw Him as setting Himself above the Mosaic law to change it, to rectify it.

Therefore in John chapter 5 and verse 18 we find these words: 'Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only had broken the sabbath, but said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God'. For this reason, in a human sense, that is why the Jews wanted Him crucified. He was crucified as a lawbreaker. They perceived Him to be against, to destroy, the law of Moses.

With such a backdrop and context it's amazing even the more when we read the words of the Lord Jesus Christ with regards to the law, for He speaks of the law with such veneration - in a way that no Pharisee or Scribe had ever done. You can understand why the people who were listening to Him could be puzzled by His statements in this text, and also why people even today and throughout all of church history fail to understand what the Lord Jesus was really saying when He spoke of the law saying He had come not to destroy, but to fulfil.

One of the most famous heretics of the early church, the second century heretic Marcion, was one who found these words of the Lord Jesus very difficult. Indeed Marcion rewrote the New Testament, and he eliminated all the references to the Old Testament. In other words, whenever the Old Testament was quoted, or there

was an allusion to a truth in the Old Testament, he extracted it from his particular New Testament. In fact some of his followers went even further, and they dared to reverse the verse's meaning that we've read - verse 17, they changed it to say: 'I have come not to fulfil the law and the prophets, but to abolish them'. They turned it on its head because it was so difficult for them to understand how the Lord Jesus Christ had not come to destroy the law, but how He had come to fulfil it.

Indeed, in our modern church day today we have the same types of people. We could christen them 'Libertarians' - anything goes. They teach the doctrine of antinomianism - 'nomia' means 'law', 'anti' means 'against' - they're against any laws. They believe that because they are saved by grace and grace alone, that therefore living by grace there is no law needed for the Christian. They believe, theoretically, that the only law that the child of God has is a law of love. Love is the only absolute truth, and therefore as long as something is done in love it is lawful.

Now the question that this text arises for me in my mind, and ought to for you, is the great question: did the Lord Jesus Christ come to destroy the law? Are we, as believers, New Testament Christians, under the law? If so, should we keep the law of God? And if that is not the case, does that mean that we can do what we please? Well, out of all the Scriptures within the word of God, this scripture ought to settle those questions for us, because the theme of them is Christ's relationship to the law, and what the Christian's relationship to the law ought to be. What was Christ's attitude to the law of God, and what should ours be?

With that in mind I want us first to look at verses 17 and 18, to Christ and the law - the Lord Jesus Christ and His view of the law. The first question I want to ask is: what is the law and the prophets that our Lord speaks of? That's very important to understand. In verse 17 He says: 'I am come not to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am come to fulfil'. Now what was the law that the Lord Jesus was speaking of? Well there are four uses of the law within the New Testament in relation to the Old Testament. The first is the ten commandments that you find in Exodus chapter 20 - the Decalogue, the ten words of God, that is like a summary - if you like, the moral law of all that is taught within the first five books of the Bible. That's the first definition of the law of God, the ten commandments. A second definition is the Torah, the teaching, the Pentateuch, the first five books in the Bible - from Genesis through to Deuteronomy - that is, if you like, the elongated law. The third definition of the law is what we find here in verse 17, the law and the prophets. Whenever you find that phrase, 'the law and the prophets', throughout the word of God it is speaking of the whole of the Old Testament Scriptures in the eyes of the Jew. It's a term that summarises our Old Testament. Then the fourth definition that we find in the New Testament of the law of God, is the oral and scribal law. The oral and scribal conditions that were laid down by the Scribes and the Pharisees - that is the most common meaning of the law that we find within the New Testament Scriptures. So, whenever the law is most commonly spoken of in the New Testament, it is speaking of the oral traditions of the Scribes and the Pharisees.

Now if you go into the Old Testament Scriptures you will find, generally speaking, that there are few rules, but rather there are broad principles out of which a man and a woman in Judaism was to derive the laws and the rules for their life. There aren't that many rules and regulations in the Pentateuch, but there are principles laid down - often illustrated by specific examples - whereby the children of Israel were able to discern what is sinful and what is not sinful, what is good and what is bad. To the later Jews, and specifically some of the Jews in Jesus' day, these broad principles were not enough. They believed that every single matter in life had to be covered within the law of God - because it was God's last word to His children, there must be within it, if not explicitly there must be implicitly, guidance and direction and law for everything in life.

Therefore that's why you find, within the New Testament, the Scribes and the Pharisees arguing that it must be possible to find out a rule for every single man in every situation of life that is possible. From that perception of the law of God there arose this race, this group of men, called 'Scribes'. It was the Scribes job

to reduce the great principles of the law of the Old Testament to, literally, specifically, thousands upon thousands of rules and regulations. If I can give you an example of the Sabbath day, you will know that the principle of the Sabbath day in the Old Testament was: no work was to be done upon it. But for the legalists, for the Scribes and Pharisees who had a passion for definition, that was not enough.

So they asked the question: 'Well, what is work?'. The word of God says that work was to carry a burden, perhaps - that's how they interpreted it. But to say it's to carry a burden wasn't enough, they had to go on and say: 'Well, what is that burden? What's the definition of the burden?'. So, the scribal law that was written down - and I have it before me here, I'm going to read it to you - this is what they say was the law, the rule, the regulation for the Sabbath day: 'A burden is: food, equal to the weight of a dried fig; enough wine for mixing in a goblet; milk, enough for one swallow; honey, enough to put into a wound; oil, enough to anoint a part of the body; water, enough to moisten the eye salve; paper, enough to write a customs house notice upon; ink, enough to write two letters of the alphabet; and a piece of reed, enough to make a pen with to write those two letters'.

So the Scribes and the Pharisees spent hours upon hours arguing what was right and what was wrong according to the law. They argued over how far a man could carry a lamp from one place to another. They argued if a tailor sinned by keeping his needle stuck in his lapel walking out on the Sabbath. They argued whether it was a sin for a woman to wear a brooch on the Sabbath day, or whether it was a sin for her to even wear a wig. To go out on the Sabbath with your false teeth in was a sin - how many transgressors do we have here this morning?! To wear your wooden leg was a sin, and even if a man lifted his own child it was seen by a Scribe and a Pharisee to be a transgression of the Sabbath day.

Now listen: that was the essence of religion to a Pharisee and to a Scribe. May I make a contemporary application of that right away, before we go on any further, that to some Christians in Ulster and even in this church, that is the essence of your faith! What you do and do not do, but more specifically what other people you are looking at do do and don't do! That is not God's religion! In fact, that is the very thing that the Lord Jesus castigated with the most strong words that you will ever read in the New Testament.

The Scribes were the men who worked out these rules. The Pharisees were a group of men - 'Pharisee' means 'separated ones' - and they were separated from the ordinary activities of life to keep all of these rules and regulations. Now, as I said, it was an oral tradition, but in the third century it was written down and it's known as the 'Mishnah'. It comprises about 800 pages, in English, of rules and regulations that the people of God ought to keep. Then a few years later they made commentaries of them called the Talmuds, and they went into it even further about how they ought to keep the law.

Now let me say that, although that is the law that Christ castigated within the Scriptures, that is not the law that He speaks of in this verse. If you look at verse 17 you will see that He specifically says: 'The law and the prophets', and that was our third definition of the law, meaning a summary of the whole of the Old Testament Scriptures. So, that is what the law is that the Lord speaks of in this verse.

Then we must ask the second and most obvious question: how did Christ fulfil that law and the prophets? In verse 17 the word 'to fulfil' literally means 'to make full'. It means more than to simply fulfil, it has the sense of completing something that was incomplete, bringing to perfection something that was imperfect. It in no way means 'destroy' or 'make obsolete', but it means 'something added to' - to perfect the law. I believe that our shoes should be off our feet at this moment - why? Because we find here an exclusive statement where only one man, and the only man who could say such a thing, says: 'I am come to fulfil the law'. From Adam there was never a man who could say that, but only our Lord Jesus Christ could say: 'I have come to fill up the law, to fill full'. You can understand the horror, the gasp, of the Jewish people - that this man was actually saying that He could fulfil the law - it was blasphemy to them! He is placing Himself as the exact

fulfilment of all of the word of God! The law and the prophets, the Old Testament, He is claiming to be the fulfilment, the consummation of everything that we find in the Old Testament Scriptures.

Now in the light of that we must beware that we don't neglect the Old Testament. We ought not to neglect the Old Testament - and some would say we are under grace and not under law, therefore the Old Testament has nothing for us. That is not what the truth 'we are under grace, but not under law' means. In fact, as Oswald Chambers said: 'It is surprising how easily we can juggle ourselves out of Jesus Christ's principles by one or two pious sayings repeated sufficiently often'. We must deal with these verses, because Christ said He had come to fulfil the law.

The law and the prophets, the Old Testament Scriptures, they all point towards Him - why wouldn't He come to fulfil them? He's hardly going to destroy things that were telling of a future day when the Christ would come. The general sense of what the Lord says in verse 17, if you look at it, is this: 'I came to elevate the standard of the law. Whoever therefore shall ignore, theoretically or practically, the raising of the standard shall not enter the kingdom'. He had come to fill the law full. Now that presupposes that the law was lacking - and we know that the law was lacking, because men couldn't obey it, men couldn't follow it. But the Lord didn't come, literally the Greek means 'to take it down stone by stone' - but the Lord came that He might fulfil it in all of its aspects, to fill up the half-filled lamp of the law with the oil of heaven.

Now, how to He do that? Two ways: first of all He did it as the doer of the law, and secondly He did it as the teacher of the law. He fulfilled the law because He did it - the only man ever in time who was able to obey these precepts. But more than that, at the cross of Calvary He suffered its penalty. In all aspects - take, for instance, the moral law, the ten commandments; He kept all of the ten commandments. Take the ceremonial law: He embodied all of the laws types and symbols that pointed toward Him in all the sacrificial system - the Lord fulfilled all those prophecies in Himself. The judicial law, He fulfilled it because He personified God's perfect justice, righteousness and holiness, and He came and told John the Baptist that all righteousness must be accomplished and fulfilled.

But that is not the sense here: He's not talking about how He'll fulfil the moral law, the ceremonial law, and the judicial law - but I believe what He is speaking of here is a practical righteousness, the practical aspect of the law. We must beware of those who tell us to push aside the Old Testament as an antiquated and useless book, replaced by the New Testament. As J.C. Ryle said: 'The Old Testament is the germ of Christianity, the Old Testament is the bud of the New Testament gospel flower'. If that is the case: how then, practically, do we in Christ fulfil the law of God?

Well, if you think for a moment of an acorn, there are two ways to obliterate an acorn. I can take an acorn and set it on a rock, take a sledgehammer and smash it. Or I can take that acorn and I can plant it in the ground, and out of that acorn there will sprout an oak tree - but the original acorn will be destroyed. That is how the Lord Jesus fulfils the law, He does not come to obliterate it in the sense of smashing it to insignificance, but He comes actually to set it up on a pinnacle where it had never ever been before - in fulfilment in a human being!

Just in case you don't believe that, or His listeners didn't believe it, in verse 18 He says: 'Verily I say unto you' - and that's the same word as 'Amen' - He's saying: 'I mean what I have just said', and to point it out He says, 'Not one jot or tittle will be removed from the law. Not one jot or tittle will be removed from the law, until heaven and earth pass away'. Now a 'jot' in the Hebrew language was a bit like an apostrophe in the English language - it's hardly even a letter at all, it's so small. A 'tittle' is a little tail, if you can look at the letter 'i' in verse 17 - our English letter 'i' - you see the little bits that hang over the foot and the head of the letter 'i' - that little bit hanging over the edge is just like a tittle in the Hebrew language, it's just a little tail, a serif. Two of the most smallest aspects of the Hebrew language, He is saying that not even a dot, if you like, or a cross of a 't' will be taken away from the law until heaven and earth pass away.

What He is saying is: nothing in this law will remain unfulfilled - nothing! The heaven and the earth will be the last things to pass away, and the law will not pass away until they pass away! Until all of the types of God's word are replaced with the anti-types, the real thing that they pointed towards, until the symbols are replaced with the reality, the law of God will not pass away! If I can give you an example, the millennial reign of the Lord Jesus Christ that is spoken of in the prophets and throughout the Old Testament Scriptures, that must happen - mustn't it! That is a fulfilment of the law of God, and the heavens and the earth will not pass away until Jesus shall reign where'er the sun doth its successive journeys run.

So the law, the Old Testament, will not pass away - not one jot or tittle - until Christ reigns upon the earth. The heavenly bodies are made His heralds, showing fearful signs of the coming of the great day of the Lord. The law fulfilled in the fact that heaven and earth, think of it, this earth that we're on and the heavens are being preserved to let the Old Testament Scriptures be fulfilled! I hope you can see that in that sense Christ upheld the law. He insisted that it must be fulfilled, 'I didn't come to wipe it out, it must be fulfilled'. But note, He didn't say that it would never pass away: it will pass away when all that it has prophesied is fulfilled.

Now that is Christ's view and relationship of the law. But the second thing I want to draw your attention to in verses 19 and 20 are: the Christian and the law - the Christian's attitude to the law. There are great ramifications concerning what our Lord Jesus said for us. What is our relation to the law of God to be? Now we must consider what the purpose of the law was, first of all, in the Old Testament. We must beware of the error of thinking that Jews got into heaven by keeping the law - that was never the case. It was not for salvation, but it was to show the sinfulness of mankind to themselves - it was like a mirror. With that condemnation of the law, that they were guilty before God, there was a penalty - and the penalty was: the wages of sin is death. If you broke one commandment you are guilty of all, James says. God, because He is a righteous and a holy God, demanded a penalty for our transgression of the law! We read within the New Testament the glorious message of the new covenant, that Christ died for the ungodly. There is that great penalty, where Christ in His death satisfied the demands of God's law, satisfied the demands of a righteous and a holy God - in His life, by living it; and in His death by dying the penalty of the curse of the law for us.

Now please note this: if that is the case, the law cannot be overthrown - because in the very gospel you have the law enshrined in the death of the Lord Jesus Christ, for He was under the penalty of the law, and because He went under the law we are under grace! He has made us dead to the penalty of the law through His work. The penalty has been paid, it's no longer over our head - that's what Paul means when he says that we are no longer under condemnation. The law of God was a tutor, until Christ came, to show us our sin - but now Christ has come, He has set the law on a place that it has never been before, it has been fulfilled by blood-bought humanity in Christ!

It's wonderful, isn't it? Now that begs the question, very obvious - and time is going on, but...should the Christian keep the law? I mean, if Christ enshrined the law and we are fulfilling the law because we are in Christ, ought we to keep His commandments? Now if you go through the New Testament Scriptures you'll find that 9 out of the 10 commandments - the 10 words, the Decalogue that you find Exodus 20 - nine of those are repeated in the New Testament - nine. That would be an endorsement to me that they are to be kept. Now they aren't given with the penalty of death on them, in other words they aren't given as law - but they are given as principles whereby we live, training in righteousness. All scripture is profitable - isn't that right? - for instructing in righteousness, and the only commandment that was never repeated is the Sabbath day, because Christians do not keep the Sabbath day, they keep the Lord's Day.

But as we will go through these verses of Scripture in the days that lie ahead, you will find that the ten commandments - the law of God in the Old Testament - is repeated right throughout the Sermon on the Mount, but it's a greater law. It's a fulfilment of the law. It is Christ coming and filling up what was lacking

within the law. If you look, for instance, at the one that we will deal with the next week - verse 21: 'Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill' - but the Lord goes further than that and says: 'Thou shalt not hate'. So Christ is upholding the law and the prophets, He's not destroying it but He is amplifying, developing them, into deeper implications for the Christian.

The first thing I want to leave with you, with regards to your responsibility to the law, is this: righteousness is the object of our reward. As a believer, righteousness is the object of our reward. Verse 19, you've to keep the least of these commandments. He's just been talking about one jot or one tittle, now He talks about the least of these commandments - and if you don't keep them, and you teach other men not to keep them, you will be guilty! Now the interesting thing about that statement of the Lord that 'if you don't keep them, or if you teach other men not to keep the least things in these commandments', it shows to me that often our doctrine is lowered to meet our conduct - isn't it? We lower our doctrine to accommodate people that aren't doing it anyway - 'go with the flow'. Now listen: the mistake of legalism and Pharisaism, we often think it was being too tight - and sometimes it was - but the greater mistake was opening up the laws of God to allow them to sin!

So, if I can give you the example of divorce, you could divorce your wife for burning the dinner. That's the truth! You could give her a bill of divorcement for burning the dinner. You can imagine, there were two different schools of Rabbi - one didn't teach that, the other did, and everybody followed the one that did! Not surprising. What that tells you and I is this: we have a natural tendency to relax God's commandments.

What are we to keep? What are the least of His commandments? My friend, listen: is it not both the Old Testament law and the New Testament law? Now, what do I mean? Yes, the Lord Jesus Christ has fulfilled it all in His death and resurrection, but if He has taken the Old Testament law and put it on a pinnacle, and amplified it and elevated it to a place that it has never been before - that is what we find in the Sermon on the Mount. If that is what we find, that is the law of Christ that we ought to keep! In a sense we are still keeping that law, but in a fulfilled state.

My friends, this is staggering to me, because we will be called the least in the kingdom of heaven if we teach others to break these small commandments - but more than that, He is saying that there is this aspect of a day of recompense, there's a day of reward, the kingdom of heaven speaking of it. When we will receive according to our - listen - works! Some people have tried to say what the difference is between the righteousness of the Pharisees in verse 20 and the righteousness that we are to practise: 'Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven'. They say: 'Well, it means that we are clothed with the righteousness imputed by Christ at the cross, we are given the righteousness' - that is not what it means! Don't pervert the word of God! Why does it not mean that? Because how could that be a righteousness that exceeds? That would be a righteousness other than - this is a righteousness that is of a kind, but better!

Our righteousness is to be exceptional - oh yes, it's exceptional, as the New Testament teaches us that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh. But do you know what it is talking about here? Not about right-being, right-being is important - that's what the Pharisees and the Scribes didn't have, they were not new creatures in Christ Jesus - but let me ask you a question: if we are right-being, we are born-again, we are regenerated by the Spirit of God, ought that not to spawn in our lives right-doing? And if we have a right-doing that spawns from right-being, and the Pharisees and the Scribes didn't have right-being, does that not conclude that our righteousness ought to be exceeding more than theirs?

It's so humbling, isn't it? For the church today is full of people who say: 'I want to be a Christian, I want to be a recipient of the ministry of this church, I want to escape hell fire - but don't ask me to do anything'. That is not the Christianity of the word of God. The Pharisees followed the law, and the law was their goal - as long

as they fulfilled the law, they were happy. But the Christian doesn't follow the law as a goal, but he follows the law of Christ as a means, because it's the law of love. If you're following a law like the Pharisees, and it's your goal, as long as you get A-B-C and 1 to 10 you're happy - but if you're a Christian, and you're following the law of love, you can give the sun the moon and the stars to Jesus Christ and it's not enough! That is a righteousness that exceeds the righteousness of the Scribes and the Pharisees. Augustine said: 'The Christian life can be summed up in one phrase: love God and do as you like'. Love God, and if you love God you will keep the law of God in Christ.

We don't exceed the righteousness of the Pharisees in the quantity of the good things that we do - we could never do that - but it's the quality. Can I ask you, as we close: do you have something real, rather than something formal? Do you have something internal, rather than an external religiosity? Do you have something spiritual, rather than material? And do you have something practical, rather than ritual? The prophecy of the millennial reign of Christ to God's people, Israel, was this: 'My Spirit will put My law in your hearts'. It's not a contradiction to have the Spirit and to have the law together, but the believer fulfils the law of Christ by the Spirit of God. You claim to have the Spirit of God, can I ask you as we begin these studies in the weeks that lie ahead: are we living the law of God in the law of Christ? God willing we will find out if we are.

Lord Jesus Christ, Thou who hast said to us: 'Ye are the salt of the earth, ye are the light of the world', and given us a name that is Thy name, we know that we will need Thy life in order to keep Thy laws. We pray that in the weeks that lie ahead, as we have presented to us the highway of holiness in the elevated law of Christ, that we may have grace to obey - that men may see our good works and glorify our Father which is in heaven. Amen.

The Sermon On The Mount - Chapter 4

"Christian Homicide"

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Matthew 5:21-26

Now we're turning in the New Testament again to our studies in the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew's gospel and chapter 5. We took a brief break over the Sunday School Prize Giving and, indeed, our day of prayer and fasting from these studies - but we're returning again to the greatest sermon ever preached by our Lord Jesus Christ. We're looking this morning at the subject of 'Christian Homicide', Christian homicide - and we're reading verses 21 and 22.

The Lord Jesus says: "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire. Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift. Agree with thine adversary quickly, whiles thou art in the way with him; lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison. Verily I say unto thee, Thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing".

Let's bow our heads together and let us pray that the Lord may speak to us, that His fiery glance would come and look at the motives that control and the place, the chamber, where polluted things hold empire o'er our soul. Father, we pray for Thy Holy Spirit. We ask that He may come in convicting power upon Thy church, that He would come and speak to us of Christian homicide, and how we as the people of God are so often guilty of the sin and the seed of murder. We pray that You will help us to be open-hearted, that You will help us to be honest with ourselves and with Thee, our God - that You will speak to us, cleanse us, and heal us of all that is contrary to Thy will and word. We pray in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.

In our last study in the Sermon on the Mount you will remember that, in verses 17 right through to verse 20, the Lord Jesus Christ laid down how He had not come to destroy the law - which was the accusation to Him of the Pharisees and the Scribes - but He had come to be the filling up of the law, the fulfilment. He, indeed, in Himself as a person, as Messiah, was the fulfilment of all that the law and the prophets foretold and pointed to. Therefore the Lord in those verses, verses 17 through to 20, and especially verse 19, told of how He was, in Himself and in His new covenant and new law, uplifting the law to a position that it had never held before. We see the Lord Jesus Christ as the new lawgiver, we see the Lord Jesus elevating the law of Moses, indeed the law of God, to a position that it never ever had before - for the Lord Jesus was enshrining God's holy law in the new covenant of Christ.

That is what the book of Hebrews is about, isn't it? In Hebrews 7:22 we read these words: 'By so much was Jesus made a surety of a better testament', of a better covenant. Hebrews 8 verse 6: 'But now hath he', the Lord Jesus, 'obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises'. Isn't it wonderful to have entered into something new, to have entered into the new covenant of the Lord Jesus Christ? But we had to be reminded in our last study that that does not mean that we are antinomian - in other words, anti-law. It doesn't mean that we disregard the law of God, it doesn't mean that we ignore it in our sinfulness - or as Paul put it: 'Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?'. That is not an option for the child of God.

So, to clear all these questions up that the Scribes and the Pharisees were asking concerning the law of God, the Lord Jesus presents Himself in the Sermon on the Mount as the pivotal point of history, as the one who will fulfil God's law and, indeed, in His own disciples and in His own people, will have a people - a peculiar people, a new nation of God - who will be zealous of good works, and who effectively will live out in the Spirit the Sermon on the Mount. Of course the running theme right throughout this sermon is the difference between the letter and the Spirit. It is the contrast between the religion of the Pharisees and the Scribes, and the faith of the Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ. The Pharisees' religion was outward, it was an outward conforming to man's rules and the traditions that they deciphered from the law of God. But the Lord Jesus was coming along to them and speaking of a new righteousness, a righteousness - as He said in verse 20 - that exceeded the righteousness of the Pharisees. This was something deeper, this was an inward righteousness. In other words - as we see in the book of Ezekiel that will come to pass one day to the children of Israel, and did in the day of Ezekiel - they are given a new heart, a new spirit is put within them. This is not the stony righteousness of outward external conformity that does not change the dead, stone-cold heart - but this is an internal, supernatural change where God comes into the life and the Spirit of God lives through external righteousness.

So we have the difference between the letter and the Spirit. The difference between keeping to every jot and tittle of the law without a change of heart. The difference between external conformity to the law without an internal change to love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind. We must be very careful in these days, because there are two extremes within Christendom. There is the extreme of not regarding the law of God at all - in other words, the Bible does not matter. Things are thrown out that are not the tradition of men, but the tradition of the word of God! We must beware that we do not disregard the law of God. That is one extreme: where every man in the church does that which is right in his own eyes. But there is the other extreme, and I think that this extreme could be more deadly, because it is more subtle, because with its externality of religiosity it gives the assumption within the mind of the person committing this sin, and within the eyes of those around him who witness him, that he is alright and that his heart is OK. Of course, it is modern day Pharisaism - and I'll give you an illustration of what it is. It is studying the word of God down to every Greek verb and participle, but there is no reality of the thing you are studying in your heart! That is the letter, not the Spirit. When we get to a position where our little idiosyncratic doctrines are more important than the theological and spiritual principle behind them, we are according to the letter!

That is exactly what the Lord Jesus was preaching against in this sermon. That is why He says in verse 20: 'I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven'. He now proceeds in this passage to give five illustrations of the meaning of how our righteousness ought to exceed the righteousness of the Pharisees. He tells us that our righteousness can be estimated by the depth to which it goes. In other words, the righteousness of the Pharisees were whitened sepulchres - their outside walls were white and clean, pristine with all the rules of men, but if you were to delve deep into the chamber of the tomb of their heart you would find dead men's bones. So our righteousness is to be estimated by the depth to which it goes.

So the Lord begins with the sixth commandment in verse 21: 'Thou shalt not kill'. He says: 'Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time', you notice He says that it was heard, because they didn't read, or many of them couldn't read. Indeed there weren't enough editions of the word of God, as we are blessed with today, to go around. So what happened was they all gathered together on the Sabbath day, and they read together the word of God in the synagogue in worshipping. Every Sabbath a portion of the law was split up into seven sections and read by seven different people, and then it was followed by a reading from the prophets. How carefully every Jew sat there, Saturday after Saturday, listening to the law of God, and they heard the law of God. 'Ye have heard that it was said'.

In verse 21 He says 'it was said by them of old time', that would be better translated, I believe, 'to them of old time'. It was said to them of old time, in other words, God spoke this! In Exodus 20 you can see the law given to Moses by God, it was spoken to the people of God by God. Then in Deuteronomy 5 it's repeated by Moses, ultimately from God, but by Moses to the people. In Exodus 20:15 you find this very sixth commandment: 'Thou shalt not kill'. The Master is insisting that we are not to see God's law as the law of Moses, but we are to see it as the word of God. He now unfolds to us the law of God in its inner, fullest sense, in its greatest meaning, in its prophetic implication in Himself - 'I am come not to destroy the law, but to fulfil it'. In verse 22 He shows how He is doing this, how He has come as the fulfilment, He says: 'But I say unto you'. 'It was said to you by God through Moses of old time, but I say unto you'.

Now that's emphatic, that word 'I say'. It means 'in contrast to what God has already said'. 'I am coming to you as God's new utterance. I'm revealing to you the more perfect way. I am the Minister of the new covenant'. We should ask the question - this is what is being spoken, but who is the Lord speaking to in this passage? This is so important. If you look down verses 21, right down into the very last verse of this section, you will find that the word 'brother', or 'brethren' comes four times at least. If you turned to Paul's letter to the Galatians 3 and 26 - you don't need to turn to it, but if you were to look there you would say that Paul says of all Christians: 'Ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus'. So all who are believers are sons of God, they are sons of the Father - and that necessitates that they are brothers one to another. It means that in their behaviour they ought to behave charitably to one another, as the word of God puts it: brotherly kindness. If you were to turn to 2 Peter 1:7 he says that the foundation of Christian qualities within the Christian character is 'add to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity'.

Brotherly kindness, this relationship in the family of God, and charity - the one to the other - is nonnegotiable. So, when you come to this passage and what the Lord Jesus Christ says, He isn't addressing the world. He's not addressing men and women in the ordinary family, He's talking to the family of God. In fact, what He is saying is: 'This type of misconduct between brethren is far worse than the misconduct of the world'. He is saying it is worse that believers behave in a murderous hateful way the one to the other.

Now, you see, the backdrop to all this is the way that the Jews kept this sixth commandment, 'Thou shalt not kill'. They believed that if that sin was abstained from, as long as they didn't strike the final blow, that they were righteous in the eyes of the law - 'As long as I don't kill someone in cold blood'. But their cloak of false righteousness had been taken off them, because the Lord is now laying down that you can no longer take pride in not committing murder. Murder is deeper, murder begins with a seed in the depths of the heart - and we're all murderers by the Lord's definition!

It gets worse as you through the New Testament Scriptures, because when you get to that great epistle of love - 1 John chapter 3 and verse 15 - you read these words: 'Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him'. Now, if you want to dilute that - go ahead, but you'll pay the consequences! Whosoever hates his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him. What the Lord is doing is He is tracing the actual physical act of murder in cold blood with a man's hands to the seed within the heart - right back to the spring of action. He deals with what Dr Campbell Morgan calls: 'Murder in the making'. The Lord is dealing with nipping in the bud what will eventually come to fruition in literal hate or murder, what will effectively come to bear fruitfully as a flower of murder.

What the Lord Jesus is doing is He is tracing the germ, the real germ to its origin: 'The foul overt crime of murder', He says, 'begins in the very heart of the believer'. So we come to the crime of murder, that is the crime that the Lord is laying down as a possibility in the life of a believer: murder! Christian murderers! 'Thou shalt not kill', it would be better translated: 'Thou shalt not murder'. The case is one of homicide, and the idea is the idea of the city of refuge within the Old Testament. In other words, the fact of murder is

certain, but the motive is uncertain. When a man committed manslaughter in the Old Testament, he ran to a city of refuge and there he was safe - but he had to be judged there whether his motive was right or not for running away, whether he had literally committed manslaughter or cold-blooded murder. He flees to the city of refuge, and when he is tried it is decided whether the fugitive has a right to the privilege of sanctuary or not. He has to be judged, that's right throughout Numbers and Joshua.

But the Lord Jesus says, in the light of that, verse 22: 'I say unto you: it's not just the act of murder that has to be judged, but it's the very seed of murder in the depths of your heart'. So He tells us the three crimes, the seed of murder. Look at verse 22, the first: 'But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment'. The first sin of murder is silent hate, I've entitled it: 'Murdering with the Heart'. It's the idea of anger within your heart to a brother. Now, in the New Testament there are two Greek words for anger. The first is 'thumos' (sp?), and it means like a flame that comes on dried straw - it flares up in a moment, a great bright flame, and then it suddenly goes out. An anger that quickly blazes up and then just as quickly dies down. It's an anger that rises speedily and then speedily passes away - 'thumos'.

Then there is the Greek word 'orgay' (sp?), and it describes a long-lived anger. A person who nurses their wrath in their bosom, who keeps it warm. It is an anger over which a person broods and meditates, and on which he allows himself to actually die within that murder, and he doesn't let the murder die within him. Have you ever met believers like this? I have. I'm sure there's been times I've been guilty of it myself. You can see them: miserable looking people. They sing the hymns: 'Oh, happy day that fixed my choice on Thee, my Saviour and my God', and they have a heart filled with pent-up anger, pent-up bitterness. People who never speak to you because they've got a chip on their shoulder, people who don't sing the hymns because they're so bitter that they have no joy of God in their heart any more. People who are annoyed because someone did something to them 20 years ago and they still haven't forgot about it!

Do you know what was remarkable to me as I was studying this passage? This seems to be the sin of the church! It seems to be riddled with this murder in the heart, murdering with the heart - a silent hate, something that is nursed in your bosom that you keep warm, that you have as a little titbit that you can brood over - you never allow it to die, you never allow healing in your heart. Old Cicero was not a Christian, but he had some wise things to say and one was this: 'Anger is a disposition where nothing can be done rightly or sensibly, it is brief insanity'. There are Christians walking about today in the flesh, and they are in insanity because of an inner heart hate against another brother or sister!

Well, let me tell you what the word of God says - James chapter 1 and verse 20: 'The wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God'. Whatever your cause may be, if your heart is eaten up with a passionate anger, your cause is wrong! Therefore our Lord Jesus Christ forbids, forever, anger which broods and anger which will not forget, anger that refuses to be pacified and that seeks revenge and retribution. In fact He says that if you inhabit that anger, you're a murderer!

Silent hate is the first thing He prohibits. The second thing, in verse 22 you find: 'Whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council'. This is speaking with contempt - the first was silent hate, murdering with the heart, but this is murdering with the words. This is when your anger is permitted to express itself in an utter contempt for another brother in Christ. The word 'raca' is an Aramaic word, and the sense of it is 'vain and empty' - to be a vain and empty person. If you want to put it into our contemporary language, you could say that it's calling someone 'a good for nothing', or an 'empty head'.

There's one occasion, at least, I found in the Old Testament where this word is used 'raca'. Second Samuel 6:20, and you have the account there that after David danced naked before the Ark of God, it says: 'David returned to bless his household. And Michal the daughter of Saul, his wife, 'came out to meet David, and

said, How glorious was the king of Israel to day, who uncovered himself to day in the eyes of the handmaids of his servants, as one of the vain fellows shamelessly uncovereth himself!'. David comes home after worshipping the Lord with all his heart, with all his soul, and with all his mind - and his wife is standing there in jealousy and in sarcasm, and says: 'You're empty headed! What were you doing today? Like one of those vain fellows shamelessly uncovering yourself'. Do you know what happened Michal? She became a barren woman - if you want to put it in our terms: she became an unfruitful Christian because of a loose tongue! That is the fruit of loose tongue: unfruitfulness.

Our Lord first treated the anger as a feeling within the breast in the heart, and now He goes further and He proceeds to the case where angry words display the feeling within. Do you know what this does when anger is put into words? Effectively the reason why it is murder is because it depreciates the value of the one we offend! You're saying: 'Raca!', you're saying, 'You're good for nothing! You're empty headed!'. Not only is it hate and murder, but it gets worse because it is false witness. The Lord is speaking of a relationship between brothers and sisters in Christ, and you can't call anybody good for nothing who was bought by the blood of Christ! How can you do that? It's a lie! Whether it's in your heart, or whether it's with your mouth - how can you call anybody good for nothing who is a son and an heir with the Lord Jesus Christ? How can you call anybody good for nothing that one day will rule and reign with Him, and will share all eternity with the Lord Jesus Christ? These words of contempt must cease, brethren! They must stop!

It can come from the pride of birth and snobbery, from money, from material things. It can come from contempt because of the knowledge you have, and perhaps one of the worst of all snobberies is intellectual snobbery. But the point is this: you can never look with content upon a man for whom Christ died! Many a man's character has been assassinated and murdered by another child of God. We all have met people whose anger bubbles over into words - people, even maybe here, would that be possible? Even here? People who you're afraid to speak to because you don't know what way they're going to take you up, or you're afraid to joke with because they always take you the wrong way? Grumbling people, always grumbling about someone or something - and the only time you hear them is when they've something ill to say about another! What about this character assassination? What about it? Do we commit it? Murder in the house of God!

That is murdering with the heart, and murdering with the words - thirdly He says, in verse 22: 'But whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire'. This is murdering, I believe, with curses. First of all it starts in your heart, then it starts with the words of contempt, and then finally it starts with words of cursing. It's anger assuming an unsuppressed energetic activity - it's inflammatory language of passion. Now, if this word here - and we don't know - but if this word is Greek, it means 'fool' as the Authorised Version translates it. But I suspect that it's a Syriac word, which actually means stronger than 'fool', because it seems that the Lord is going down in a digression of deeds and sins and wrong, and it's getting worse and worse. If it's a Syriac word 'moray' (sp?), it means 'rebel'!

So you're going from one who hates in their heart, down to one who calls another 'worthless', and then finally to one who calls a brother a 'rebel'. It seems to account for the increase in penalty that we'll see in a moment, but you know that word 'rebel' has, even in a legalistic sense in the land, the court of the laws, is an awful criminality - a terrible thing. The idea of treason, rebellion, and literally in the law in Deuteronomy 21, that sin of rebellion was worthy of death - so you would have been stoned for it! If it's 'a fool' it means 'a moral fool', it means to be dead, it means what the Psalmist says: 'The fool has said in his heart: 'No God, I don't want You in my life, I don't want You in my heart''. But the point is this: this is hate going from the heart right to the words, and getting even worse from the words and coming to a curse - and it's literally a wish that the person would be dead!

The believer can do that! In other words, rebellion was a sin that was worthy of death, and if you call another a 'rebel' in this context it means that you want them to die! You have it about today, you know. I want to say

this, because it brings it home. Do you see when you hear people say: 'God damn you'? That's what they're doing. That's what the Lord Jesus is talking about. When you hear someone say to another: 'Go to hell', that's what they're saying. Jesus is saying that one who utters such a word is in danger of hell fire themselves! Now I want you to see this, in Numbers 20 verse 10 - and I believe this is what was on the Lord's mind, although I can't prove it - but it says there about Moses and Aaron, they gathered the congregation before the rock. We were hearing in the Breaking of Bread how Moses was probably the greatest man in the Old Testament, and that's right - but there are Moses and Aaron, and he says to the congregation around the rock: 'Hear now, ye rebels; must we fetch you water out of this rock?'. 'You rebels, why won't you obey God?' - and God kept Moses and Aaron out of the promised land because of that, because they called God's people rebels!

Calling a child of God [a rebel], it seems, in the Old Testament was an unpardonable sin - not in eternity, but in time and in the law - you had to die for it. The Lord is saying that calling a child of God a rebel is a great sin today, because it sets a child who has been reconciled to God by the blood of Christ among the enemies of the most high God. You're lining up another child of God with the hordes of hell! What you're saying when you use that language like that is: 'If I had the power, according to my will, I would put you in hell'. It's an awful thing to hear a believer threaten another believer. It's an awful thing to hear a believer curse another believer, and use violent words against them.

Do you see the Lord's teaching? He's teaching that anger contains the seed of murder. He's saying that anger contains abusive language, which is the spirit of murder, and anger is cursing language which implies the very desire to murder! Now what's the sentence, as we close - and I want to finish this - what's the sentence for murder that the Lord gives? Think of this: Christians going down for murder! Our Lord uses illustrations that would be familiar to the disciples of the law courts of the day, and He's telling what will happen. In His day if men disregarded the common judgement of the court, they were in danger of being brought into the inner court, the synagogue, and if they disregarded that they were in danger of the final judgement - they were handed over to God! What the Lord is saying is that God will hold everyone responsible for their actions and for their motives: we will be judged as believers! Don't think that we're going to get off scot-free for everything we say and do as believers because the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin - I don't believe that! I believe that there is a judgement for us, and there will be loss!

The first thing the Lord mentions in verse 21 is that those who commit this hate with the heart are in danger of the judgement, that's the local court of the synagogue where ordinary misdemeanours were tried for minor offences. So if you're guilty of having hate in your heart, it's as if you were guilty of going to the court of minor offences. Then He says that if you have this contempt with your words, you're in danger of the Council, that's the central court of the 71 members of the Sanhedrin that met as the people of God and the leaders, religiously. That's a more serious charge if you say 'raca', 'empty head' to someone. Thirdly there's the fire - now it's not hell fire, it's the fire of hell, the fire of hell. The word is 'Gehenna', the word speaks of a place, literally, in Palestine. It was the Valley of Hinnom, it was the city rubbish dump south-west of Jerusalem, where criminals bodies - after crucifixion - were dumped and were burnt up. It was also where people who weren't crucified were burnt to death at the stake! 'Where the worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched', and the Lord often uses that place 'Gehenna' as a picture of hell.

Now, my friend, here we're getting to the point. Does that mean that we are guilty of hell if we show violence to another believer? Yes, it does! Did you hear me!? It means we're guilty of hell! What is the grounds of this guilt? I'll tell you what it is: in the Old Testament whenever you had something against another the two of you were to come together, and you were to stand before the Lord, and if you falsely accused the other person you were to suffer the punishment for what you accused them of. You notice in these verses that the Lord says that you will be in danger of these things. In other words, if you hate someone from your heart, the guilt you have ought to make you in judgement - and if you go as far as to act violently or speak violently against another believer, you are guilty of hell! You're in the danger of it!

I believe in eternal security like anybody but, my friend, I'm not going to water down the words of the Lord Jesus Christ for anybody. It tells me this: that if this is the way you behave in your life, you deserve hell! Praise God you'll maybe not get it, but you deserve it! You're in the danger of it. It's not literal, because there's not going to be any Council in the millennium reign of Christ that's being spoken of here, there's no Sanhedrin there, neither will there be any hell fire - but the Lord is looking at the question of guilt. He's saying you are guilty of this - one who commits the first of these crimes, and the second of these offences, in God's sight is on a par with one who is guilty before the synagogue or guilty before the Sanhedrin. Anybody who goes as far as to commit the third of these things - awful thing - is in the rank of judgement with the worst of criminals, that is what God is saying. To be cast into the city rubbish dump for execution, that's the kind of thing this hate between believers is worthy of!

Dr Plummer (sp?) says: 'To cherish such feelings is a kind of murder, and merits the like penalty'. It is worth the penalty of murder to hate your brother and your sister, it is worth the fires of hell. It's a difficult verse to interpret, and I don't know whether you'll all interpret it the way I do - but do you know something? The one thing is for certain is that the Master places anger on the level of murder. Murder! Christian homicide! Christian murder and Christians going down for murder, and it's serious, and just as any nation or government brings people to account for the crimes, the Lord is saying: 'Even the children of God will be brought to account for their crimes. You're in my kingdom!'.

Do you know what we all do? This is what maybe some will do after this, they run to that wee phrase: 'without cause'. 'Ah, but I have a cause!'. We could go into the text and see how, possibly, that's not what that means - but anyway, that's for another day. The problem is here, I know that there is anger with a cause - but do you know what those angers are? An anger for the glory of God, an anger for ill-treatment toward another brother and sister, but there's never ever righteous anger toward self. Never ever self defence. I think we use this 'without cause' as a cloak to cover over our own wrong, as a salve to our conscience at times, to try and convince ourselves. Yes, there is a holy anger against sin, but let me say this: there is an unholy anger against people - the brethren!

How do we fare? Now, come on, let's be honest with this: how do we fare? The truth is that churches are being wrecked at this very moment as we speak because of this sin! Murder in the house of God! Hate in people's breasts! Words and actions - people standing in members meetings and tearing one another apart! Christ's word says there'll be hell to pay! We may even be paying it now, with the church of Jesus Christ in shreds. Are you in the gall of bitterness today? Are you? Are you wrecked with a hate of the heart? Have you spoken words? Do you know what the answer is? We'll look next week at how this affects the church more literally, but do you know what the answer is? Repent! You're in sin! Repent!

Oh, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity. Oh, to have the disposition of Christ. Do you know something? Do you know what the message of the Spirit is? You can't imitate Christ, but if His Spirit is to come into your heart and you allow Him to move: He can be formed in us as a gift by the Spirit. Our Lord is going behind the rules of the law and actually breathing spirit into it to give the disposition that allows you to live this law! It's impossible unless He puts His Spirit in us, and He makes us from within outward. Oswald Chambers said well: 'When a man is born from above he does not need to pretend to be a saint, he can't help being one'.

Oh, can you not help being a saint? Some of us can't help hating others, some of us can't help saying violent words at one another. My friend, this is not the way things ought to be, for the Lord said through His apostles: 'Little children, love one another', 'By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples: that ye love one another'. If you can't do that, praise the Lord and come to Him - come to Him, as the Beatitude says: 'Blessed are the poor in spirit', come to Him and receive the power by His Spirit to live the way that you ought to live. It's wonderful, isn't it, that we should have the Son of God formed in us by His Spirit.

Let's bow our heads. If we're all honest this is a sin we are guilty of, every one of us. I'm not saying that some of you don't have hurts deep down that were made by others who didn't show love towards you, but murder and hate. But I want to point you to the Saviour who, when He was reviled, reviled not again for you. That is the one you are called to follow, the one who was despised and rejected yet endured for the joy that was set before Him. Will you let Him come in and heal your hurt, and heal your hate, and let the Son of God be formed in you?

Father, we pray that You will deal, by Your Spirit, with folk that are hurting, with folk that are hating - that they will see the danger that they are in, they are in the very danger of hell. Oh Lord, we thank Thee that we won't go there - but, Lord, to be in the danger of it! Lord help us, help us to repent, and help us to shut our mouths when we ought to - but, Lord, it goes further than that: help us to be changed in our hearts, where all these things proceed out of. For we ask these things in the name of the one whom we are to follow and have formed in us, the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.

The Sermon On The Mount - Chapter 5

"Be Reconciled To Thy Brother"

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Matthew 5:21-26

Now our reading is taken again from the Sermon on the Mount this morning, from Matthew chapter 5. Matthew chapter 5, and we'll begin to read at verse 21 - and you remember that last Lord's Day morning we looked at verses 21 and 22, half of these words of the Lord Jesus Christ concerning the sin of murder among brethren.

Verse 21, remember it is the Lord Jesus Christ speaking: "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool", or rebel, "shall be in danger of hell fire. Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift. Agree with thine adversary quickly, whiles thou art in the way with him; lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison. Verily I say unto thee, Thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing".

Let's take a moments prayer: Father in heaven, these are very difficult words that we ponder today. Indeed we have felt the two-edged sharp sword of the word of God already from studying these words, but we pray that we will be honest with ourselves, that we will be honest with Thy word - and, Lord, that we will root out those things in our lives which are not pleasing to Thyself, Lord that we will follow the example and the teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ. Impart Thy Spirit to us for understanding and for the power of the preaching, for we ask it in the Saviour's name. Amen.

Last week we learnt how the Lord Jesus Christ went from the mere outward committal of the crime of murder to the very seed of it within the heart. We looked at how it can begin with an inward hate, deep in the heart where no man can see, only God, there can well up within us a resentment toward another. We saw that the Lord Jesus Christ went further than the Pharisees to simply judge the outward expression of violence and murder, but to go deep within the recesses of man's motives, those dark recesses and chambers where polluted things hold empire o'er the soul. The Lord Jesus pronounced judgement upon the inward hating of the heart, but He went further and described how that hatred of the heart can express itself in contemptible words toward another. He went further and said that those words, like calling your brother 'Raca', 'empty head', was worthy of judgement also.

But we saw the very disturbing words of the Lord Jesus, that when we call our brother or sister in Christ 'Fool' - and the definition of that word 'fool' we saw is really 'rebel', or someone who is against God and exempt from the grace of God, perhaps calling someone beyond redemption and worthy of condemnation - by that very act we put ourselves in a place that is guilty of hell fire. Now that is very important, and I hope that I stressed to you that does not mean we will get hell fire, for there is now no condemnation for them that are in Christ Jesus. But what the Lord was saying is that if this was in the law of the land, if this was in the legal civil system, we would be under severe guilt and penalty. In the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, to have such a hatred between brethren in the Lord is guilty of hell fire.

Therefore the Lord seeks to illustrate these principles, this is what we're going to look at today in verses 23 to 26. That's why He begins with this word in verse 23: 'Therefore' - 'The implications of what I have just said', verse 21 and 22, 'I want to illustrate to you what I mean'. Now the Lord Jesus, here, was laying down a principle which these Jews would have known very well. The idea behind it is this: the concept of sacrifice. The Old Testament concept of coming to the altar and bringing your gift to God for sacrifice. Often not known to us today in the New Testament age, in the Old Testament if a man did a wrong thing that action actually disturbed his relationship between him and God. That is why sacrifice came in, now we all know this: sacrifice came in to restore the relationship between that man and his God, but the Jew in the Old Testament never ever held the view that sacrifice could atone for deliberate sin - that is very important. Sacrifice never, in the Old Testament, atoned for deliberate sin - or what the Jews called 'the sin of the high hand', in other words wilful, rebellious sin against God.

Now, if a man committed a sin unawares - if you like, was overtaken or swept into sin in a moment of passion when his mind was not in him - the sacrifice that the Jews knew, they believed to be able to atone for those sins. But if a man deliberately, defiantly, callously, and open-eyed committed a sin against God, those Old Testament sacrifices were powerless to atone. Before we go on any further, we know today in the New Testament that all the Old Testament sacrifices were powerless to atone, but what I speak of today is the instructions, the reason why God gave these sacrifices. God was telling them: 'Those sins that overtake you, those sins that you commit unawares, if you give this offering I will look down and have grace upon you. But if you deliberately commit a sin against me with your eyes open, callously, those atonements will not suffice'.

Let me give you an example. If a man was making a sin offering, say to atone for the sin of theft, that offering was held completely unavailing until the things that that man stole were returned to the owner. So if you came as a thief to offer your sacrifice unto the altar of God there had to be a judgement take place, there had to be a criminal inquiry as to whether what you had stolen had been restored. If it was found out that you had not restored the things that had been stolen, your offering was taken out of the camp and it was burnt as something that was unclean. Also you remember from the Old Testament that if a man was taking his paschal lamb to the priest as an offering, and if on his way he remembered that he had leaven in his house he had to go back to his house, take out the leaven, before he brought the offering to God. Now this is so important, for I want you to see that there is not a carte blanc atonement for sin in the Old Testament Scriptures. The atonement and the offering that we find there does not atone for deliberate sin against your brother.

Therefore, to be effective, the sacrifice had to include confession of sin. To be effective there had to be the element of true repentance - in other words meaning the rectifying of the consequences of your sin toward your brother. It wasn't enough to simply come to God and confess your sin, but you had to go to the one offended. Even the Day of Atonement couldn't avail for a man's sin unless he was personally reconciled with his neighbour and his brother.

Now in the light of that backdrop of the Old Testament we see the significance of the words of the Lord Jesus. It's very clear and categorical what He is saying, in fact He is enshrining this principle in the law and saying to His disciples: 'You cannot be right with God until you are right with men'. In other words, we cannot have the hope of forgiveness until we have confessed our sins not only to God, but to men that we have offended. Indeed, I believe that this is the backdrop to the teaching in the book of Hebrews, and there's a very difficult verse that many theologians ponder and debate about and confuse many, in Hebrews 10 and verse 26. It says this, now think of in the light of what we have just looked at: 'If we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins'.

Do you see it? 'If we sin wilfully'. Indeed it's what David was encapsulating in Psalm 51 and verses 16 and 17, when he prayed to God over his sin of adultery which was wilful, deliberate, open-eyed sin, he says: 'Lord, thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it', sacrifice would not atone for that sin alone, 'thou delightest not in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise'. This is so important for our understanding of what the Lord Jesus Christ said and so, with this Old Testament Jewish concept as a backdrop, let's look at the first illustration that the Lord Jesus gives us in verses 23 and 24.

We could put it like this: He describes a scene of strife in God's house, and how it ought to be resolved. Strife in God's house resolved - and the question that has to be asked of us, and let me say that the Lord Jesus Christ pulls this illustration from the Old Testament, speaks to his disciples, and the principles that are behind it apply to us today in our dispensation and in our age. They ask us the very pertinent question: are we participating in futile religious practices? In other words, if we come to worship God and we remember that our brother has aught against us, it is futile to worship God. It's pointless! The reason, perhaps, we are coming to the Lord's Table - to confess our sins, to examine ourselves - if we haven't made things right with our fellow men, the Lord will not see our worship.

I believe, perhaps in the mind of the Lord Jesus, that as He speaks of these men coming to give their offering to God to the altar, He has in His mind the idea of the offering that Cain and Abel gave in the book of Genesis. As you look at that, you find that there is a principle that there must first be acceptance of the offerer before there is acceptance of the offering. We read: 'And the Lord had respect unto Abel and his offering, but unto Cain and his offering He had not respect'. There is acceptance of the offerer before the offering can be received.

This applies to the Lord's Table. The Table of the Lord is a place not only of worship, but it is a place where there is manifested the union of the Lord's people. It speaks of unity, it is the table of fellowship. That's why, in the book of Corinthians, Paul says to them: 'For we being many are one loaf, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one loaf'. As the loaf is broken and each little bit of bread is consumed by you, the loaf still exists, but it exists pulling together every participant in the Lord's Supper. We become the one loaf. It was talked of in the early Church as 'The Love Feast', and each brother is to worship God, lifting up holy hands without wrath or doubting before God. Love is to be our constant spirit as we worship the Lord, and the Lord Jesus says - whether it's the Old Testament offering, whether it's this middle partition in between the Old Testament and the New that we have here, whether it's now in our church age - He says: 'No matter what is, as we worship God we are not to retain our anger against brethren'.

We grieve the Holy Spirit, and it hinders our communion with God, when there is anger between us. It is backsliding, and the Lord speaks of it as such. He says our worship is futile because of the disposition that we are in, and that's why He says in [Romans]: 'As far as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men'. Now can I ask you in light of this: are you perhaps participating in futile practices? Are you here today and you maybe don't realise, because of the disposition of your heart, that your prayers don't even reach the ceiling? The reason for that is that you may suffer from a pricked conscience, that is the illustration that the Lord gives. If you come to the altar, you walk through all those holy places, and come to the place where your sacrifice and offering will be accepted - and as soon as you come to that altar rail and you lift that sacrifice up to God, you remember something! The wrong, anything that gives you a cause to be annoyed, or indeed specifically here a cause for your brother to be annoyed at you - 'If thy brother hath aught against thee'. In Mark's gospel the Lord Jesus speaks of the opposite: 'When ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any'. So if you have got something against someone else, or if somebody else has something against you, and you come to worship God and God's Holy Spirit reminds you of that - you've got to do something about it! Do you know why? Because if you carry on without offering it means nothing.

It is the convicting voice, that solemn moment when you bow down to worship God and suddenly you become conscious of something that is wrong. You come to God in deep sincerity, you really want to worship Him, you come to God's altar to give a gift to God and for God from your life, but then suddenly - as if a cloud blocks out your mind - you remember a sin that casts all of God's brightness away from you. You remember a wrong you have done to your brother, or a wrong that he or she has done to you. My friend, don't think this is chance that it comes into your head, it's not! The Lord Jesus says that it is God, He infers that God is bringing it to our mind in order that we deal with it. So often when things come into our mind we blame the devil, don't we? We say: 'I hear the accuser roar of ills that I have done' - but maybe it's not the accuser roaring! Maybe it's the Holy Spirit of God coming and putting His finger on something that is not right between you and your brother, and that's the difference between the Holy Spirit and the accuser. The accuser brings to your mind things that God has already forgiven, the accuser brings to your mind things that you have repented from and confessed to God, but the Holy Spirit brings to your mind things that you're still hiding from Him.

This is God's voice speaking to you. Everybody wants to hear God's voice today, don't they? 'I want to hear God speak to me. I want to see God. I want to know God actually relating to me and having a relationship with me' - but nobody wants to hear this voice of God. Nobody wants to hear God reminding them of something that they have against their brother. This is so awesome, because it is the realisation of this in our hearts that will determine the acceptance of our offering to God, and ultimately the blessing that God gives us in our lives! The blessing that we have as a Christian will depend on how we deal with that voice in our hearts. Indeed, possibly I would go as far as to say that the whole future of our spiritual experience will depend upon how we deal with that voice!

Nothing could be of greater importance at this moment in time than that you listen to what God is saying to you. As you've come into this place and perhaps here remember - I'm not talking about some kind of introverted fanatical raking up of something morbid, I'm not talking about looking for things because when you do that Satan can grab hold of those things and torture your mind and heart. I'm not asking you to wallow in your sin, and to become all self-loathing because of it - but what I am asking you to do is: if the Holy Spirit brings to your mind and heart a sin against another brother, deal with it! Bring it into the light! Plunge it beneath the blood, and have done with it and forget about it! But, oh, deal with it!

We can be participating in futile practices because of these things. As we come, if our conscience is pricked, do you know what the Lord Jesus Christ says that we must do? We must pursue reconciling priorities. We must get our priorities right, and the priority in this instance is not the Breaking of Bread, it is not the worship of God - but the Lord Jesus says the priority, look at it, is to leave your gift. In other words there is an obstacle to be removed before acceptable worship can be rendered by your heart. Something has to be done! He says: 'Leave your gift, and first be reconciled to your brother'.

Now imagine the implications of this. If we don't leave our gift and be reconciled to our brother it means that our prayers are hindered, it means that God doesn't hear us. The prophet said that: 'If I regard iniquity in my heart the Lord will not hear me'. Feelings of separation and enmity between disciples and believers doesn't just affect our relationship with them, but the Lord is saying it affects our relationship with God, and indeed God's relationship with us - His ability to bless us. We make an obstruction before God in order that He can't touch our lives because we're obstinate and rebellious toward Him.

How much more powerful and availing would prayer be if Christians were not divided? Have you ever thought about this? My friend, if you're sitting here and the Holy Spirit has brought to your mind something that someone has against you, or that you have against someone else, I know what you're thinking: 'Well, I'm not going to make up! I wasn't the one in the wrong, it wasn't my fault!'. Or maybe it's: 'I was in the right, and it'll only give them a smug satisfaction if I went to them and sorted things out'. Listen to what Oswald

Chambers says: 'Unless you are willing to yield your right to your self on that point absolutely, you need not pray any more for there is a barrier higher than Calvary between you and God'. That's serious, isn't it? To have a barrier higher than Calvary between you and God!

So the instruction of the Lord Jesus is: 'Go! Postpone your offering to God. Seek reconciliation with your brother'. Guy King, the great Christian writer, said this - and I agree wholeheartedly with him: 'Probably there are more churches deprived of spiritual blessing for this cause than for any other, and', he says, 'probably there are few quicker ways to an outpouring of blessing than the happy composition of these quarrels'. It's probably number one on the hit list of the reasons why God is not blessing His children, and it's the very thing that if we were to do - leave our offering and go to our brother - the whole outpouring of God's blessing could come in upon us!

So, 'Go', He says. 'Ah, but it's not my fault', isn't that what we say? 'But I didn't do it! Whose fault is it? Who's wrong? Surely you have to decide who's wrong and then it's the wrong person goes to the person who is wronged. Surely you have to get things right, whose fault it is, who has been wronged?'. My friend, look at the words of the Lord Jesus: 'You go if your brother has something against you!' You might not have anything against him, but if he has something against you and you know it, you go! It doesn't say: 'You meet him halfway', it says: 'You go to him' - there's no questions of your rights that come into it. What the Lord is saying - do you know what He was saying? 'If you are so earnest to bring your gift to God, can you be brave enough to go to your brother and bring him your heart?'.

It's serious, isn't it? You do need to be brave, because it's absolutely humiliating. It's hard to do. It's hard and a proud man can't do it, a proud woman can't do it. But it still remains the fact that the quickest way to the heights is down to the depths. Some of us find that our efforts in doing this are ignored and rejected, and you can only do your part and then come back to offer your offering to God - you can only do what God has asked you to do - but I have found in many occasions that the opposite is the case, that this is the best advice that has ever been given to anybody in the world, because more often than not it works! You and your brother can be united together because of the honesty, because you have opened your heart to them - but the fact is this: whether they accept it or not, the Lord says it must be done! It must be done!

Sometimes it's not just an apology, but it's restitution has to be added. Some of you men will remember hearing about the Nicholson shed in the shipyard, that's restitution. That is when these men were converted, and they realised that there was so much that they had stolen from the shipyard that they were pricked in their conscience - and they knew that they weren't right with God because of it, so they brought everything back, and they had to build a new shed because there was so much came back. My friend, that's restitution - and sometimes there is a restitution that needs to be made in connection with the wrong that we have done to our brother. If we desire God's blessing in our life, we need to go now, we need to go straight away and do something about it, whatever the cost. Do you know why? Because it's getting in the way of you and God, can you see that?

I believe in the power of the blood, oh, I believe it. But I believe what Duncan Campbell said, and it is this: 'Calvary will not cover what you will not uncover'. We need to bring it into the light, for if we walk in the light - if we walk in the light - we have fellowship one with the other, and the blood of Jesus Christ God's Son cleanses us from all sin. I would vouch to say that God has never forgiven a sin that has not been confessed. Oh, I know there are secret things that we can't even remember, but you know it's the disposition of our heart - that's what He's looking for. The disposition of whether our heart is confessing known sin and all unknown sin that we have - but there are some of us that hold a little sin, and it could be this sin against another brother, and we will not let it go - and that will be the death of us spiritually!

There is strife in God's house that must be resolved, but secondly the illustration that the Lord gives us is strife in the courthouse that must be avoided. Verses 25 and 26, He says: 'Agree with thine adversary

quickly, whiles thou art in the way'. Agree with him quickly, and the scene that's given here is two men going to the courthouse - one has something against the other and he's dragging him to court. Now they're not just ordinary people, these are brethren, these are the children of God, these are Christians. Now that word 'adversary' doesn't mean, how we think of the devil, as a deadly foe - but what it does mean is 'one who has a lawsuit against another'. Here the brother has something against his brother, and he is bringing a lawsuit against him and taking him to court. These two brethren are subjects of the King, the Lord Jesus Christ, the King of kings and the Lord of lords. The Lord is saying: 'My courts are open, my courts are in heaven, and differences between brethren and breaches of the peace of my kingdom will come before me if they are unresolved in this lifetime'.

Do you see what He's saying? The purpose of the Lord's words here is to show us that present quarrels here and now will affect our future in eternity. They will affect it! If we don't settle the matter now out of court we will be taken to court and the Lord will deal with us there judicially, in a way where He can see everything! The reason why the Lord gives this illustration of the court is twofold. The first is that He wants to stress that urgency is needed in dealing with these things. Urgency! 'Agree with thine adversary quickly while thou art in the way' - hurry with the reconciliation. While you have the opportunity, do it before the opportunity passes. The Lord speaks of a debtors prison, He speaks of a man being taken to court and He's saying to him: 'Before you cross the threshold of the court, before all hope of an amicable settlement is gone, deal with it! While you're going to the court let the settlement be done, arrange a settlement now before the law takes its course'.

Along the way it's possible to come to some agreement between you, it's possible to arrange some terms of payment of the debt, but you've got to do it quickly. You've got to do it on the way to the courthouse that's no great distance. You've got to do it before it's too late, for if it's postponed you enter into the time factor - that is exactly what the Lord is illustrating here - for we do not know what a day brings forth. You don't know! Death hurries us beyond the power of reconciliation. Death takes us to a place where we no longer can control our relationships and apologise for past thoughts, but where God will judge them.

Suppose that we were to die quite soon and you never settled that problem. Suppose the Lord was to come again, and He's coming very soon, He could come at any time - that's what the Lord means when He says: 'While you're on the way'. Do you notice that life is but a few yards along the road of eternity, along that road that comes to a courthouse where we can be cast into prison and we will be in there until we pay every farthing?

What is the key to this interpretation? I believe it's Romans chapter 14 verses 10 to 12, listen to what Paul says: 'But why dost thou judge thy brother? Or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God. So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God' - specifically that verse is in relationship to your relationship to your brethren. Second Corinthians 5:9 and 10: 'Wherefore we labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad'.

Come with me for a moment to the judgment seat of Christ. You face the Lord, unreconciled with your brother and sister in Christ. What are you going to say? What will you say? 'Lord, it wasn't my fault!' - do you think that's going to wash? Was that not what Adam said? 'It was her fault!'. The Lord says: 'If anyone has ought against you, you go'. What are you going to say? 'Lord, You don't understand' - the All-knowing doesn't understand your problem? The one who hung on a cross and said: 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do', He doesn't understand the problems that you have with another brother? 'But Lord, I couldn't admit that I'm wrong, I just couldn't bring myself to do it!'. I wonder, if we say that the Lord might

say: 'Are you sure you're in the right place? Are you sure you didn't get mixed up in the queue? Because this is the place where blessed are they that are poor in spirit!'. Poor in spirit!

You see the Lord, through Paul in 1 Corinthians 11, brings this right home with regards to the Lord's Table - how everything must be in order, and if we meet at the Lord's Table and we have not agreed with our adversary quickly, we will be in trouble in eternity. Now I'm not talking about hell, I'm not talking about purgatory, but I'm talking about eternal loss! Eternal loss! How are we to obey Christ? Do you know how we're to obey Him? Look: do you see if I was to take this passage and bring it right today, here and now, and say: 'Now how, Lord Jesus, can we apply this here in the Iron Hall?' - do you know what He's asking you to do? Before I even finish my message this morning, He's asking you to get out of your seat and go over to a brother that you've offended. That's what He's saying! Now, I would drop dead if that happened! But my friend, that's what He's asking, isn't it? That, perhaps, would be the greatest message ever preached in this Hall, and you'd be the one preaching it.

You see, what we do is we don't do it quickly, sure we don't? That's the problem: we don't do it when we're offended, and these things grow out of all proportion. They're like the acorn covered over and ignored, unseen in the heart of the earth, and one day will spring to a shoot and then to a small shrub - before we know it it will grow into a mighty, strong, overwhelming oak tree out of man's control! That's what's happening all around us: family quarrels that have descended down generations, and still haven't been solved. Within the church family, perhaps a silly word 10 years ago festers and is the cause of a schism 10 years later! As far as I can see - now I can't see everything - but as far as I can see most of the Evangelical splits today aren't about doctrine, sure they're not? They aren't about the truth, but they're about some problem or grievance that was never confronted at the time and has grown into a monster of destruction!

What do we do? We don't agree with our adversary while we're on the way, we say: 'Ach, just forget about it! Forget about it, it's nothing' - and that is the most deadly thing of all, because it's not nothing. Christ doesn't tell us to forget about it, because it's the seed of murder - and that's not nothing! Eventually the seed of murder will cause blood to be spilt! We could go on, literally, into how to fulfil this - because the Lord was talking about a debtors prison, and if you owe money you need to pay it! Owe no man anything - and as the man says, and he's right: 'A pound covering your eye can shut out the light'. There's many an unbeliever has been put off Christianity because a Christian owed him too much money!

You can apply it to everything - but whatever you apply it to my friend, the point is this: restitution has to take place quickly. I read this week that it happened once or twice during the Keswick Convention that the town's Post Office had run out of postal orders through the working of the Holy Spirit on the consciences and wills of many who, longing desperately to be right with God, had been convicted about their unpaid bills - so they went down to the local Post Office and sorted them out.

There's a penalty that's threatened, and that's why the Lord said: 'Do it quickly'. Gehenna was the illustration given last week - 'Gehenna', hell fire, that doesn't mean we get hell fire, but it means that that is the worth of the crime that we're committing amongst brethren. What is the penalty here? It's being cast into prison and paying everything, every last farthing - that's not purgatory, but what the Lord is saying is: 'If you committed this crime against ordinary people in society and were caught, you'd be put into the debtors prison until you paid it and you wouldn't get out - yet you're committing it among brethren, and you won't go and sort it out!'.

In 1 Samuel 15, and I close with this, Saul was told by God to go and destroy the Amalekites entirely. Do you remember? 'Go and destroy the Amalekites, women, children, all their animals, destroy absolutely everything'. Do you know what he thought? He says: 'I don't need to go as far as that, now do I? I don't really need to go to that length, I'll spare some of the people and some of the beasts, and some of the cattle I'll spare to sacrifice to God'. He thought all was well, and what was the next thing he did? He came and worshipped

God, but suddenly Samuel the prophet arrived and said: 'What have you been doing?'. Saul replied: 'I've just been carrying out the commandments of God'. 'If you have', said Samuel, 'what is the meaning of the bleating of the sheep and the lowing of the cattle that I am hearing? What have you done?'. 'I decided to spare some of them. I wanted to spare some of them for God'. Then Samuel, he uttered these momentous words, listen: 'Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams'.

One great preacher said of that story: 'I always feel sorry for King Saul, because I understand him so well'. We'll go to the altar, we'll remember, but will we leave the altar? 'First go to thy brother whom thou hast offended and be reconciled and then return'. Do you see if we did this? There would be no-one here tonight only them who had sorted out their differences. Do you see if that happened? The windows of heaven could open out and pour blessing so great that we wouldn't have room to receive it.

I bring my sins to Thee,
The sins I cannot count,
That all may cleansed be,
In Thy once open fount.
I bring them, Saviour, all to Thee,
The burden is too great for me'.

Now please: don't commit the sin that the Lord is telling you not to! Don't confess it to God if you're not prepared to confess it to the one you've offended.

Let us bow our heads, and I know I made a comment earlier on that I would be very surprised if this happened - but, you know, it shows us how far away we are from the mark. We don't even believe that this is possible. You know, how great it would be after this meeting - no-one would know why you were doing it, not that it would matter anyway - if you wandered over to that person. It doesn't matter whether you're right or they're right, what matters is that it's sorted out. That's the only way, today, that you can obey this message.

Father, we pray for grace, for these words are hard words. They strip us of all pride and selfishness because none of us like to admit that we're wrong, or even take wrong when it's not our own, but Lord we have Christ as our example - and that is exactly what He did. He was counted among the transgressors, that freedom might be bestowed upon the repentant. Lord, help us, please help us - give us grace to obey Thy word. Lord, we know that the blessing will be enormous - in our own lives, even, the release and the joy that will fill us for settling these differences within our lives. Now we pray that the grace of God, and the love of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the peace of the Holy Spirit may reign among us now and evermore. Amen.

The Sermon On The Mount - Chapter 6

"Dangerous Liaisons Of The Mind"

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Matthew 5:27-30

We're turning again to the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew chapter 5, Matthew chapter 5, and we're looking this morning at verses 27 and 28. Just before we read these verses together, let's bow our heads in prayer and come before the Lord and ask Him that He will speak to us through His infallible truth today. Our Father, we come to Thee as the One who has inspired this book. We come to Thee who has written Thy word down for us, that we might know Thy mind and Thy will, that we might be instructed in the ways of righteousness and truth. Lord, we live in the world that is full of lying and deceit, and we pray that as we have come and shut the world out in a measure today to seek Thy face and to seek Thy guidance, that Lord You would reveal Yourself to us. We pray for those who are sick, we pray for those who mourn, we pray for those who are sad, but Lord we pray most of all for those who are in sin - believer and unbeliever alike - that You will rescue them, that You will fill this place now with Thy Spirit, and take a dealing with us. For Christ's sake, Amen.

Matthew chapter 5 and verse 27 and 28: "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart".

I want to entitle my message today: 'Dangerous Liaisons of the Mind' - dangerous liaisons of the mind. It is true that the Eskimos of North Alaska on the American continent, until recently, lived in such a way and in such a custom as men and women would have done 500 years ago. In fact, for food they depended mostly on the polar bear. They depended on the meat for food, they depended on the fur for clothing, they depended on its fat for cooking, and they depended on its bones and its teeth for tools. So you can see how, in a prehistoric way, they depended upon this animal in every quarter of their livelihood. Because of that, over hundreds of years, they developed an ingenious way of catching polar bears. What they would do is: first all they would kill a small animal, for instance a seal, and they would take that carcass and corpse and drag it across the snow, and bring a trail of blood through the snow leading to one specific central location. Then they would take a knife, and they would freeze the handle of that knife deep into the snow and ice, about two feet. That was a sharp, double-edged knife, and they would place the carcass over the double-edged blade. The polar bear, eventually, would see the tracks of blood in the snow, would follow those tracks of blood and find that there was an easy meal for him. Once he tucked in to the food, that delicacy would be devoured very quickly, but the Eskimos were smart enough to know never to use a large animal upon that blade. The reason why they took a small seal was that they wanted the polar bear to be incredibly hungry after eating the seal. Just as you remember perhaps as a boy, or maybe like me as a husband, once your wife has beat the cream you like to take the whisk and lick the cream off. That's what the polar bear does: he devours the little seal, and he licks the blade. He licks, and licks, and licks - and a phenomenon takes place, because the more blood he licks the more blood he gets. What begins to attract him is his own blood! In fact, it is his own blood that kills him.

I would call that 'fatal attraction'. We could use it as the fatal attraction of sin, but specifically in our context today it is a wonderful illustration of this sin of lust. The Lord Jesus, as He has been doing, addresses the ten commandments and comes as the new lawgiver, as the one who will fulfil and fill up the law of God to its completion, its prophetic fulfilment, and He comes again and addresses for us the seventh commandment:

'Thou shalt not commit adultery', and the tenth commandment: 'Thou shalt not covet thy neighbours wife'. Previously, in verse 8 of this chapter, in the Beatitudes He told us: 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God'. Now He goes, not to the blessedness of the purity of heart, but rather He goes to those who offend in the sin of lust and offend against purity. He now goes to the prohibition of adultery, He now speaks concerning what will happen men, and the process psychologically and sinfully of a man who falls into lust.

Now, what He is speaking of is not what the Scribes and the Pharisees have said. If you look at verse 27 He speaks upon what God has already said, what God has declared: 'Thou shalt not commit adultery'. Now to the Jew although, as we will see in the weeks that lie ahead what they had begun to bring into vogue in relation to divorce - divorcing a man or divorcing a woman for everything under the sun - theologically the Jews saw adultery as a very serious sin. You can see that from Leviticus chapter 20 and verse 10 that teaches that it was punishable by death, stoning. You would think that was severe enough judgement upon adultery, but the Lord Jesus is filling up - He comes and brings it a further step, He goes the extra mile with the law of God. He goes further and He says that it's not enough to refrain from the bodily act of adultery, but the Lord Jesus said: 'I want you as My people to refrain from the adultery of the heart'.

So, in verse 27, He says: 'Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery', verse 28, 'But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman' - whosoever looketh! Now, this is more than a passing glance. What the Lord is talking about in the sense of the Greek word is a lingering view. Any scene of beauty can turn our head, but what the Lord Jesus Christ is talking about is when our head is turned and we turn it back again, when we take the second glance and linger. This is not an accidental sight, but this is an intentional occupation with the object in vogue. It is a deliberate harbouring of the thing in your heart and in your mind. He is not speaking of the natural and normal desires of humanity that God has put into us, and that God has blessed us and said in creation: 'It is good'. It's not the natural attraction, but what the Lord is talking about literally: the man who is condemned is the man who looks at a woman with the deliberate intention to lust after her. A man is condemned who looks at a woman with the deliberate intention to lust after her. A man who deliberately uses his eyes to awaken within his breast a lust, who looks upon a scene, or a picture, or a situation, or a scenario, or a passing person in order to arouse a passion within his heart.

Now, as the Lord speaks, the Jewish disciples - and indeed in the hearing of the Pharisees and the Scribes - they would have known exactly what He was talking about. In fact the rabbis had a saying: 'Passions lodge only in him who sees'. They said: 'Woe to him that goes after his eyes, for they are adulterous'. You see, they even knew that there was an internal desire of adultery, and adultery in itself - in a physical sense - was only the fruit of that desire. Now this is not a sudden evil thought that darts into your heart and into your soul, and you resist it and put it out of your mind and out of your heart - that's not what I'm talking about. We all get the fiery darts of the devil, but this is a heart surrender - that when a scene comes into your mind or into your breast, that you allow it to stay, you allow it to reside, you surrender your heart to that temptation, you mull it over and turn it over in your tongue. Before you know it evil has gained the victory within you. This is the man that voluntarily gazes with a view to arouse these unlawful passions within him. The irony of this sin - just like the polar bear that licks the blade over and over again and feeds his lust, but in the feeding of his lust kills himself - many a man thinks that by committing an extra-marital affair, adultery, by going after fornication, by satisfying his desires by pictures, that they satisfy that lust - but E. Stanley Jones is right when he says that the import of what the Lord Jesus Christ says here is: if you think the act of adultery, or the thought of adultery will satisfy your sex urge, you pour oil on the fire in order to quench it - it doesn't make sense, it makes things worse!

Just as the Lord has spoken about murder, hate, words, He is telling us right throughout this sermon that the acts that we commit that are sinful begin in the mind. They begin when we have the thought, when we nourish the thought, when we feed the thought, when we pour oil upon the fire of our bosom - and eventually

that seed will break forth in fruit. Again the Lord Jesus deals with another enlargement of the Old Testament law. The Old Testament law, the ten words, the ten commandments, demanded purity of life - but now the Lord Jesus goes further, and He says: 'I want you disciples to have purity of thought'. For He says: 'To succumb in the realm of thought is the equivalent, whether it be murder, whether it be adultery, to that very act itself, and will be regarded with the utmost severity as it is'.

So, in the light of these facts, I want us today to look at three things. First of all: there is a danger from within. Secondly: there is a danger from without. Thirdly: there is wisdom from the word of God. First: there is a danger from within. Many of you - perhaps not many of you, but some of you at least - will have read John Bunyan's 'Pilgrim's Progress', and if you haven't I encourage you to read it. But another book which is not as famous, but which is perhaps equally as good is Bunyan's 'Holy War'. I've spoken to you about this before, but to remind you: it's a story about a city called 'Mansoul' - speaking of the body, the soul, the spirit, the temple of the Holy Spirit, the human being. The story goes that this Mansoul is a believer, it is ruled by Prince Emmanuel - Prince Emmanuel rules in that land. But there is a foe to Mansoul, his name is 'Diabolus', which just means the devil. He is the enemy of Mansoul. There is a conflict right throughout this book 'The Holy War', and it's of tremendous importance to you and to I to understand the conflict that we are in, specifically with the subject of lust. As you go through that story you find that Bunyan lays tremendous emphasis on the importance attached to the gates of the city of Mansoul. He says that it is at the gates that the main threat is, the main threat of the welfare of the town is at the gates. As you read through the book you find out what the gates are: Eye-gate, Ear-gate, all the ways in which the body can bring information into it - and, effectively at times, take information out of it.

This passage of Scripture that we have read this morning deals with the Eye-gate. I don't think I need to tell you today in the world in which we live that the war is on. The war for Mansoul - the war for your soul - whether you're ruled by Prince Emmanuel or not, Diabolus is trying to bring you down into the mire and into the dirt of the lust. Everyone of us, the day that we were born, were born with an old sinful nature. All that is is a bias toward everything that is bad, a tendency, a bent in us to do that which is wrong and not to do that which is good. But the miracle of the grace of God is that when we trust the Lord Jesus Christ we receive a new nature. The first nature that we were born with is the nature of the flesh that feeds upon sin, but the nature - supernaturally - that is given by God to us, born from above, is the Spirit.

Now I want you to see how these relate the one with the other. Turn with me to Galatians chapter 5, and this is so important - we're talking now about the danger from within. Galatians chapter 5 and verse 17, Paul says: 'The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would'. Now I want to break this up for you for a moment, because I want you to understand everything that Paul is saying about the danger from within. First 'the flesh lusteth against the Spirit', that old nature that you were born with of wickedness and sinfulness and of the flesh that feeds on everything that this world can give it, is forever, every day, fighting with the new Spirit of holiness that God has given you in Christ. There's a war on! Every day you're being pulled between these two natures.

In fact, in the book of 1 Peter 2 and 11 it talks about how these fleshly lusts war against the soul. They are in a war against your heart! Indeed, a literal translation of Peter could be this: 'Fleshly lusts, which take the field against the soul'. Paul goes on, he says: 'The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh'. Now, the word 'and' in Greek can also be translated 'but', it's determined by the context that it's in. So you could translate this, I believe: 'For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, but the Spirit against the flesh'. That's so important, because as you read that verse you can become very negative and pessimistic and think: 'Here I'm in this ping-pong ball match, I'm pushed from one extreme to the other. I don't seem to be able to control myself, and there is this battle and it just depends on the way I feel about how I will live this specific day' - the word 'but' makes a difference. 'The flesh wars against the Spirit, but the Spirit can war against the

flesh'. The Spirit is well able, the indwelling Holy Ghost - if we will let Him - will war against those evil things within us.

Paul says these words, and I think we can all identify with them: 'So that ye cannot do the things that ye would'. That's the truth, isn't it? Left to ourselves - you've experienced it, I've experienced it - left on our own, perhaps in a moment of lack of fellowship with God, we fall into sin. The old nature comes and rises above and controls us, and we give in and we become defeated in the struggle. Whenever that happens we are bound to fail, the flesh will prevail! It may not be the actual sin, whatever it may be, but it can be the voluptuous look of that evil desire. So what Bunyan is saying is what I'm saying, and what the Lord Jesus Christ is ultimately saying, there is a spy in the castle of Mansoul! There is a weak link! There is a traitor in the eye that opens up the gates and can let sin into the city, and ultimately let ruin come in!

How does it happen? Turn with me to 2 Corinthians chapter 10, verse 5 - now here's the answer, right? You've all identified, I hope, honestly, with me that this is the way we live, that there is this danger from within - but what is the answer to it? How can we overcome it? Second Corinthians 10:5, we can: 'Cast down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God' - here it is - 'and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ'. Bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ! You're having trouble with your eyes, you're having trouble with your thoughts - your eyes, your thoughts are causing sinful deeds - how do you stop it? Bring into captivity those thoughts. Do you know what that means? Arrest them! Put the handcuffs on them! You might say: 'That's alright saying that, but I just have them, and when I have them I can't help them' - look! It is possible by the Holy Spirit to arrest those thoughts to the obedience of Christ, in other words to what He is talking about in the Sermon on the Mount. The Lord Jesus isn't going to tell us something that we cannot do! 'Every thought', do you think Paul would have said that if it wasn't possible? 'Bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of the Lord Jesus Christ'. That means that it is possible! Let this rejoice your heart: it is possible, when the thought discloses itself within our mind or heart, that we can treat it like a criminal, like an intruder, like the spy that it really is!

What would you do if you went home today and suddenly you heard a rustle in the back room, and you saw this dark figure running out of the back window and over the fence and away - and when you went upstairs into the jewellery box everything was lying around? You would go first of all to the phone, ring the police - isn't that what you would do? The police would come, and if they could catch him they would chain him and take him away. Now listen, when those thoughts come into our mind, when we look upon things with our eyes, we are told to bring them into captivity to the obedience of Jesus Christ - every single one of them! He wants us to turn to the Holy Spirit who indwells us, and literally drag that sin, arrest it, say: 'Lord Jesus, did You see what's in my mind?', and bring it into the presence of Christ - and when you bring it into the presence of Christ it will disappear! That is the danger from within. There is a spy in the city of Mansoul, and we need to realise it.

The second thing is this: there is a danger from without. There are internal considerations that we've looked at, but there are also external, because you have the devil - Diabolus - he is assaulting outside the gates of Mansoul. He is assaulting the city with his forces, his onslaughts are serious, and do you know why they are more serious? Because he's got a spy within us. They can collaborate - the old nature within is in league with the enemy without, and when those two meet together and that old world system outside the city of our lives comes into contact with that old spy, the eye that lives within us, that's the end of it! We give way, we sin, and that is the offence!

Now, please don't misunderstand me: we all have temptation, we all can have those darting thoughts that come into our heart and into our mind, that's not what I'm talking about - I'm talking about when we surrender to them. There is a difference between temptation and sin. That great Christian author Guy King on one occasion asked his children's meeting: 'What is the difference between temptation and sin?', and a little

boy replied: 'Temptation is when you're asked to do it, and sin is when you've done it'. Isn't that it? Temptation is when you're asked to do it, sin is when you've done it. Martin Luther put it like this: 'We cannot prevent the birds flying over our heads, but we can prevent their making nests in our hair'. The sparrow can't prevent the cuckoo depositing its egg in her nest, but she can turn it out - she doesn't have to sit on it and wait until it hatches, she can push it out and it's gone! If she doesn't do that, she'll realise that she will be in a heap of trouble: her home will be gone.

Now this is the crux of what the Lord Jesus is saying in the Sermon on the Mount with regards to lust. He is saying, as Thomas a Kempis said: 'Resist beginnings'. Don't even let it start! It is so tempting to let the thought come into the mind and let it stay there for a few moments - but the problem is this: when the combination of that thought and the dangers without come together, they can make life so difficult, and the only way to prevail is to let God deal with the spy inside of me, and let God deal with the world outside of him. There is a danger from without, and the weak link is the Eye-gate. The Eye-gate must be guarded, for if it sees the dark sight of a form, or a picture, or sees words written in a book, or sees a programme, or sees a website, it can kindle the thought within him and it can cause mutiny within Mansoul! It can cause a rebellion and a down-falling, anarchy! That is how that spy and that enemy without collaborate. James, I believe, was thinking exactly the same thing when he said: 'But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death'.

Now there are other gates whereby the enemy can enter into our lives if we will let him, but specifically we're concerned with Eye-gate today. If you look around the word of God it's not too long before you see how men and women sin through Eye-gate. In Genesis 3 the mother of all sin, Eve, in Genesis 3:6: 'When the woman saw'. Now, Satan had already tried to convince her that God wasn't on her side, and that God was hiding something from her - that was trying to get at her from the Ear-gate. But you can see how powerful the Eye-gate was, because as soon as she saw that the fruit was good to eat, she fell! Joshua chapter 7 and verse 21 you've got Achan - sin in the camp - and when he's describing how he took the treasure, he coveted it, and lusted after it, and hid it, he says: 'When I saw all the treasure'. The great prophet Elijah, he's on Mount Carmel, he's undaunted by the prophets of Baal - he's gaining a glorious triumphant victory for the honour of God, but as soon as Ahab's wicked Queen Jezebel sends him a letter by a messenger, his eyes see the letter and it says in Kings: 'When he saw'. There was something about seeing the letter - he knew she didn't like him - but there was something different that made it real to him and made him fear and he ran away. Remember Peter on the waves? Walking to the Lord Jesus Christ, and what faith he had even to step out of the boat and for those few seconds be walking along the water, but it says in Matthew's gospel: 'When he saw' - for one brief second he took his eyes off the Master, he caught a sight of the mountainous waves that boisterous winds had raised, and when he saw he was gone!

We live in a visual world, we live in a world that history has never ever seen. You look at marketing anywhere, on the television, in the newspaper, in magazines, even on the radio - everything is advertised by sex. The slogan is: 'Sex sells'. Whether it's ice-cream or a 4x4 greasy jeep, they will sell it with sex! Do you ever ask yourself the question why that is? The reason is they want to excite you about their product, and they know - maybe they're better theologians than some of us - that the greatest thing that will excite you is sex. In our world things all around us - imagine, you see this is what people don't think when they sit down for three hours watching the television at night, that there was a time a few months ago before this programme was shown that there was a group of people around a table discussing how they could get you to watch that, how they could get you to watch that programme! There are literally men and women today discussing how to market items, how to get you to buy them, and they're doing it by calculating what is more likely to awaken the sinful natures and desires within your soul. We live in a generation of voyeurism - voyeurism simply means that this generation gets turned on, gets a satisfaction, by watching others enjoy themselves.

Now let's be frank - and we've got to be frank, I know that maybe some of you'll be uncomfortable by some of these things that I have said, but that frankly is just too bad because our young people are listening to this every day and if we don't say anything about it we'll lose them to sin and to the world! Channel 4, Channel 5, I would vouch to say perhaps every night of the week, you can get whatever you want to view - that's not because I view it, I don't have them. Now don't tell me that if you put your young teenager in a room with a television upstairs that they'll not look at it! My friend, this is the age in which we are living, where you can get whatever you want through cable, through satellite, through anything where the censoring laws in our land are being relaxed to allow almost any perversion to be broadcast as entertainment. Videos, internet - did you know that 12% of the Internet is pornography? Twelve per cent! Every day there are 300 new pornographic sites added to the Internet! It can be the press, it can be the glossy magazines, it can be anything. D.A. Carson says this, and this is so true: 'Our advertisements sell by sexual titillation, our bookstores fill their racks with both the salacious and the perverted. The vast majority of pop songs focus on man-woman relations, usually in terms of satisfying sex, physical desires, infidelity and the like - and into this society Jesus speaks His piercing word: 'Anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her'".

We live in a society where it is easier today to commit adultery in the mind than it has ever been. Let me leave you in the last five or ten minutes of our meeting with some wisdom from God's word concerning this, and we'll look at this more next week, at the specific things the Lord Jesus tells us to do with regards to our sins that so easily beset us. But I want to leave you with six things, very quickly, that a man called Rick Holland preached on one occasion, and I heard him preaching it, six things whereby we can avoid committing this sin within our mind and then avoid, effectively, the fruit of it which is the sin of adultery or sexual immorality. Take these down if you've got a pen.

One: undertake the pursuit of biblical instruction - undertake the pursuit of biblical instruction. You go to the Psalmist: 'How can a young man cleanse his way?'. You're saying that: 'It's alright, but I can't handle it. I can't! How?' - by taking heed according to God's word. 'Thy word have I hid in my heart that I might not sin against Him'. Now, my friend, and this is for the older brethren - it shouldn't just be up to you to put the word of God in. Now please, older folk, more mature folk in the faith, Titus 2 says that the older men are to teach the younger, that the older women are to teach the younger. Please teach our young people what they ought to be doing, and even sit down - remember Ezekiel? This is a wonderful phrase, where he came to the River Chebar, remember what it says? He sat where they sat. They don't need somebody sitting down telling them they just need to quit, they need a bit of understanding and they need a bit of love. Undertake the pursuit of biblical instruction, you've got to put it in and the assembly have got to put it in.

Secondly: undress the deception of sexual sin - undress the deception of sexual sin. If you read Proverbs 5 - and you should read Proverbs, for this will give you more guidance on it than I can this morning - but the adulterous woman in Proverbs is called the 'strange woman', or the 'foreign woman', and the point is this: she's described as having honey dripping from her lips, she's described as speaking smooth words, but the word of God says her steps lead to death and take hold upon hell. In other words, what we see with the eye, we need to realise Satan is an angel of light, deceptive, beautiful, but with an awful deadly bite - and unless we undress the deception, instead of undressing the figure, we'll fall!

Thirdly: understand the value of safe distance - understand the value of safe distance. The Proverbs 5 also says: 'Young man, I'm telling you son - father to son - I know what I'm talking about'. He didn't say: 'I went up to her door, knocked it and gave her a tract!' He says: 'Keep far from her, pass not by her door'. Like Joseph running out of Potiphar's house, he left his coat with her to get out as fast as his feet could carry him away from sin. That's what God is saying: when the thought comes to us, put it out of your head! I was reading the 119th Psalm again this week in my daily readings, and what a blessing it was to me to get those

verses all together in the way that the Psalmist puts them. Here is a man who committed adultery, and do you know what he says in that Psalm? 'Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity'. Do you know what that word 'vanity' means? Worthless things! Turn away my eyes, Lord, from beholding worthless things! Psalm 101 would be a good Psalm to write over your TV - if you want to keep it - 'I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes: I hate the work of them that turn aside; it shall not cleave to me'. What about Job? I don't know how many times, as a young man, I turned up Job chapter 31 verse 1, and said: 'Boy, you're some man!'. 'I made a covenant with mine eyes; why then should I think upon a maid?'. Do you know what the bottom line is here? I'll never forget this statement as it was said to me on one occasion: 'I refuse to be entertained by that for which Christ died'. Do we?

Fourthly: unmask the regret of sin's aftermath - unmask the regret of sin's aftermath. In other words, we get this sort of, it's as if the devil drugs us into thinking: 'Look at the grass on the other side of that field, that would be great!'. But when we get to the other side of the field we're left in guilt, in remorse, and we just wish that we could turn back time and not commit that sin - but the fact of the matter is, at the point that we're tempted we need to unmask the regret of sin's aftermath; we need to think about the remorse that we will feel; we need to contemplate the public disgrace; perhaps the disease; perhaps the marriage that will never ever be the same, or trustworthy again; what your children will think in years to come when they hear of what went on in your marriage; what your mind will conjure up in times that you would just wish you could forget those things. It really is the question: 'Is an hour of pleasure worth the disaster of a lifetime?'.

Fifthly: unmask the satisfaction of marital fidelity. Do you know what the wise man in Proverbs says? 'Son, drink from your own cisterns'. You see, the mistake of the world is that you can satisfy the desire in your heart by physical relationships - like the polar bear licking the blood off the blade, do you know what happens? You keep licking because you get hungrier, and hungrier, and hungrier - and that's not what men and women need. Do you know what they need? Intimacy, intimacy! Every young person that has had a one night stand has found out that intimacy can only be found in marriage.

Sixthly: unleash the horror of God's omniscience. This is the real motivation, for the wise man in Proverbs says: 'The ways of a man are before the Lord', He sees it all. I don't know about you, but when I contemplate these things and when I think upon my past and my mind, this gives me poverty of spirit. The miracle of grace is that failure is not final, it is not! God can give to you, through the blood of Christ, something that is more precious than even virginity is - the road to recovery through the grace of God. As we come to the penetrating word of God, and as we have looked at it honestly today, do we not say with the hymnwriter, Walter Chalmers Smith:

'One thing I of the Lord desire,
For all my way has darksome been,
Be it by earthquake, wind, or fire,
Lord, make me clean!
Lord, make me clean!

So wash Thou within, without,
Or purge with fire if that must be,
No matter how, if only sin
Die out in me!
Die out in me!'

If you come back next week I'll tell you what the Lord tells us to do with regards to these sins in our lives. Let's bow our heads. Do you know what I read this week as I was studying that passage of Scripture? One leading Evangelical scholar, who we would all know if I named him, said: 'Some men can look at artistic

forms and pictures and just see them for appreciative art' - balderdash! And all you men can say 'Amen' to that, you know exactly what I'm talking about, and maybe some women here as well. These sins of the heart are hidden from everyone, but we can bring them into the light and the Lord can cleanse them and make us whole.

Father, we pray, help us to guard Eye-gate. Oh, Lord, we know that there is an enemy within - but, Lord, greater is He that is in us than he that is in the world. We pray, our Father, that we will feed the right nature, and that we will not watch worthless things. Lord, make us holy, cleanse us from our sin, and let Your nature be formed in us we pray. Amen.

The Sermon On The Mount - Chapter 7

"Cut It Out"

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Matthew 5:27-30

Now we're turning again in our New Testaments, to Matthew's gospel and chapter 5, to the Sermon on the Mount. Matthew chapter 5, and we're looking this morning specifically at verses 29 and 30. Matthew 5 verses 29 and 30, and we'll read from verse 27 to get the train of thought. The message this morning is entitled: 'Cut It Out'.

"Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart. And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell. And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell".

Last week we saw, and the week before, how the Lord defines sin for us in a new way that the law, the ten commandments, did not do. How He goes behind the letter of the law to the spirit, how He delves with His x-ray eyes right into the very depths of where sin originates in the heart. He doesn't just look at the deeds, if you like, the execution of our sin, but the Lord Jesus in this great sermon goes to the very root of our sin and beyond it to the very seed, the beginnings of sin. So, the Lord has been defining for us the sin of murder. He tells us it is not simply the act of bloodshed, but it is the very thought, the very word of hate. We looked last week at the sin of adultery, and the Lord Jesus says it is not simply that physical act outside of marriage, but it is more than that: it is the very thought, it is the second look at a woman to lust after her, and indeed a man.

But the Lord in this sermon does not just define sin for us. It would be an awful thing if He defined our sin, and He left us in our sin. But we see in these verses, specifically verses 29 and 30, that the Lord tells us how to deal with our sin. As you read these verses you can't help but see that the Lord wants us to absolutely abhor our sin, He wants us to forsake it to such an extent that it causes us to leave it. Now the question that comes to me, and is obvious from all of these verses within the sermon is: 'How can I get victory?'. It seems to be asking so much of us, not to even think a bad thought about another person; not to utter, even in private, a word that they cannot hear, but a word of hate or a word of rebuke. It seems impossible for young men and young women to not have in their minds lustful thoughts in a world that is filled, and is absolutely bombarded with lust on every hand. The cry goes out from my heart, and I'm sure from yours: how can I get victory? How can I conquer sin?

Perhaps you have said, as I have said many times: 'I cannot conquer it! It conquers me! I have prayed, I have covenanted, I have sought help, I have fasted, I have sought this blessing, that blessing, the other blessing. I have re-dedicated my life through crises experiences. I have read this book, the other book. I have tried this secret to the Christian life, this formula of biblical success - but perhaps at this very moment I am still in the snare of my sin'. Perhaps even this very week, or in the last 24 hours, we have lain in the mire of habitual iniquity and we just feel like a dog going back to its vomit, like a pig rolling in the mire, that we cannot escape it, that we cannot conquer it. I know from talking to enough people that many Christians live in that limbo of despair and spiritual frustration, and their hearts cry is: 'I want freedom from my sin!'. Well, the good news of the Gospel is this: that Christ is the Saviour from sin! Hallelujah! He is not simply the Saviour

from the penalty of sin, but He is the Saviour from the practice of sin. In other words, God can say to us today: 'Sin shall no longer have dominion over you'.

That is the good news, but the bad news is that if you're looking for a quick fix, or pain-free easy cure or exorcism of your sin, you need not come to the Lord Jesus Christ. You can see that in the strong language He uses in verses 29 and 30. It's strong, symbolic, indeed oriental language - and we'll see that in a moment - but as we read it it seems that He is being very strong, perhaps a bit too strong, but as you analyse and weigh up the statements of the Lord, you will find that He is not being too strong at all. If I asked you if it came to a choice for you between plucking out your eye and death, I'm sure that you would pluck up the courage to pluck out your eye in order to escape death. Is that not the case? It's not a nice thing to have to do, but if it meant the difference between life and death I'm sure that you would find the courage to do it. Everyday hospital patients across our land submit themselves to gruesome operations in order to save their lives, to relieve intolerable sufferings for them. I heard a man recently say, concerning one such operation: 'There's no choice when it comes to such a decision - you've no choice'.

Now if you were to do what the Lord does, and substitute death for the word 'hell' in this passage, you would see that the choice is not a choice at all. Isn't that right? You would very swiftly and definitely choose the lesser evil rather than the greater. You would choose the plucking out of your eye or the cutting off of your hand in order to escape death, but how much more would you do it in order to escape hell? I wonder is the reason why we are appalled and even shocked at these words of the Lord Jesus - it seems so violent, so extreme - perhaps the reason why we are shocked is that today too often sin is thought of as something that we cannot avoid. Isn't that right? We think of it as a disease that must be pitied, or an illness or a condition that must be treated, but whenever we see it condemned, whenever we see the command that it be repented of, it seems too strong! I remember reading Charles Grandison Finney, the revivalist in North America, who said - instructing men to preach the Gospel: 'Never ever call a sinner a poor sinner'. He said: 'A sinner is not to be pitied for sinning'. But today, perhaps, we have imbibed this idea in psychological circles that we are not to repress sin in the young people, we're not to repress it in our own lives. You can see this going right down into primary school education - you've got to let the children express themselves, and it doesn't matter what they're expressing, you've got to let them do it.

I don't agree with repression either, and indeed the Lord Jesus didn't agree with it at all - He purported amputation. Now let's look at these words about cutting it out. The first point I want to leave with you is: cutting it out. That's what the Lord says: cutting it out - cut out your sin! Verse 29: 'If thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out', verse 30, 'If thy right hand offend thee, cut it off'. If you think of it in the context of verses 27 and 28, concerning lusting after a woman, the act of adultery in the mind and in the heart, the eye is the one that has looked and the thing that has lusted. Indeed, the reason why He says chop off your hand is because the hand is often the sign of theft - we steal with our hands. When we lust after a woman in our heart with our eyes, we steal another man's wife - and that's why we don't just commit the commandment against adultery, but we commit the commandment of coveting: 'Covet not thy neighbours husband or wife'.

So that is the reason why the Lord speaks of the eye and the hand. Now here's the big question as we look at these verses: is the Lord meaning us to literally pluck out our eye, and cut off our hand? This is important, because we're the people that keep shouting about how we have to interpret the word of God literally. Can I say it is not always correct to interpret the word of God literally. A few misguided Christians in church history whose zeal greatly exceeded their wisdom have taken the Lord Jesus in these verses literally, and mutilated themselves. Perhaps the best-known example is the third century scholar, Origen of Alexandria, and he went to the extremes of asceticism - in other words, renouncing all his possessions, renouncing food and even sleep. He took an over literal interpretation of this passage and of Matthew 19:12. Matthew 19:12 reads this: 'For there are some eunuchs, which were so born from their mother's womb: and there are some eunuchs, which were made eunuchs of men: and there be eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs for

the kingdom of heaven's sake. He that is able to receive it, let him receive it'. So he made himself a eunuch, literally he made himself a eunuch! The church had to step in in AD 325 at the Council of Nicea to stop such barbaric practices as this, because it was clearly not in keeping with the teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching of the rest of the apostles in the epistles, where we're told that the body is the temple of the Holy Spirit! We're not to mutilate it!

Now if that is the case, what does the Lord mean? Surely He means what He said? He means pluck your eye out, He means cut your hand off - but if you take that literally, I would say to you that you miss the entire point! Because if you gouge out your right eye and throw it away, what are you left with? You're left with the left eye. It's no good just plucking out your right eye! Or if you cut off your right hand, you're left with the left hand. In other words, you can blind yourself in some way, you can even take both eyes out, but you can still in your own mind lust after a woman if you're blind!

This is not what the Lord is saying. What does He mean? I'll tell you what He means - this is the primary teaching of these two verses: that we are to deal drastically with our sin. Deal drastically with it! Don't pamper it, don't flirt with it, don't enjoying nibbling a little of it around the edges, but we are to hate it, we are to crush it, we are to search it out, dig it out and get rid of it! That's what Paul said in Colossians chapter 3 verse 5, listen to what he says: 'Put to death therefore whatever belongs to your earthly nature; sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires, and greed, which is idolatry', and Paul adds in verse 6, 'Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon men'. This is the reason why God is going to judge the world, and if that is the case - because the Sermon on the Mount is to believers - the Lord Jesus is saying: 'If this is the reason God is going to judge the world you should have nothing to do with these sins'. Deal with them drastically. You've no business harbouring these things, but you're to grip it on the threshold of your mind in a vice of blood and allow it no more sway with you.

What the Lord is advocating is not literal, physical self-mutilation and maiming, but what He is advocating is a ruthless, moral self-denial. Not mutilation, but mortification! This is what the Lord is teaching, this is what the apostle Paul, and Peter, and all God's men in history taught. It's this: that the path to holiness is mortification. In the great statement of the Lord Jesus Christ: 'Take up your cross and follow me'. A cross is an instrument and element of mutilation and mortification. The Lord says you're to die to your sin, you're to put your sins to death. Now what does that involve in practical terms? How do we practice this? This is what the Lord is meaning, look at the verse: if your eye causes you to sin, because temptation comes to you through your eye - in other words through the objects that you see - then pluck out your eyes. In other words, don't look at it! Don't look at the things that cause you to sin, don't use your eyes as organs of iniquity - behave as if you had your eyes plucked out and had flung them away, and you're now blind and so could not see the objects which previously caused you to sin. Again, verse 30, if your hand or your foot causes you to sin because temptation comes to you through your hands - things you do, things you touch - or through your feet, places you visit and go, then cut them off! In other words, don't do the thing, don't go to that place - behave as if you were crippled, as if you couldn't do it!

That's mortification of sin. These are the surgical demands of our Lord Jesus Christ. In other words He is saying, not literally do these things, but whatever causes you to sin, whatever seduces you into iniquity, you've got to completely and utterly cut it out of your life! He says: 'If thy right eye offend thee...if thy right hand offend thee' - that Greek word 'offend' is the word for 'stumbling block'. In Greek it is 'scandalon' (sp?), it's the word that we get our English word 'scandal' from. If your right eye causes you a scandal as a Christian, if your right hand causes you a scandal - in other words, it's speaking of a trap. Literally it comes from the word 'a bait stick', as you hold a carrot out to a donkey by the stick - well, the 'scandalon' is the stick that tempts the donkey. The Lord is talking here about anything that causes you to fall, anything that is a trap and causes your destruction.

There are two pictures for this Greek word. The first is of a hidden stone on a path against which a man walking down the pathway crigs his toe, falls over and stumbles - that's the picture. Another picture is of a cord, a thin cord across a path deliberately set to trip up a man. Another picture is of a pit dug in the ground in a forest, deceptively covered over with a thin layer of branches or turf, and so arranged that a man may walk into the forest unwittingly and put one foot in front of another and fall headlong into the pit. That's the word! If thy right eye causes thee to scandalon, or thy right hand causes thee to scandalon - in other words, if your eyes or your hands are the gates by which you are caused to sin, you've got to cut off the inlet!

In the Ancient Near East, in Palestinian days, as we read the New Testament, there is more of a meaning in the right hand and the right eye - because in their language, and in their contemporary vernacular if you like, it would have expressed something - an idiom. In other words it had a greater meaning than what we read, we only think of our right eye and our right hand, but in their day it communicated something more. It communicated a part of you that was greatly prized and that you did not want to lose. The right eye was thought to be the best eye, the right hand was thought to be the best hand. I believe the Lord was saying more than simply cut out your sin, I believe the Lord was going further and saying that there are some things in life that are not necessarily bad things. There are some things that you hold dear, that you prize, like your right eye and your right hand, your best eye, your best hand - and the Lord may require us to give up the things that are best to us in order that we follow Him, why? Because the best things about us can be the very things that hinder us.

You know as well as I do that what we are good at, at times can be the very thing that hinders us. Isn't it? Indeed, what we are good at can be the thing that hinders us being best for the Master. The eye is given to see with and the hand is given to work with, and both are innocent in themselves, there's nothing wrong with them. Let me say this: the body is not evil, and the reason the body was created neither is evil - but the point is this: your right eye and your right hand were created to be servants of the soul, servants of God. The Lord Jesus says: 'Even if you do something good with your right hand or your right eye, if it is not in service and glory to Me it is wrong and you must cut out!'. You might find it difficult to believe that the Lord is meaning that, well let me point you to a verse in Luke chapter 14. You don't need to turn to it, I'll read it to you - Luke 14 and verse 26, this is a very difficult verse for me to understand: 'If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple'. Now what does that mean? I'll tell you what it means, it means exactly what the Lord is saying here: if anything comes between you and the Saviour, legitimate or illegitimate, it is to be hated. If we misuse anything, good or bad, if we put anything in a wrong position it is to be cut off and cast away from us. As one man said: 'If my faculties, propensities and abilities do lead me to sin, then I must cut them out'.

These are hard sayings, aren't they? Cutting out first of all, then secondly in these verses there is throwing out. You pluck the right eye out and cut the right hand off, and then He says: 'Throw out, throw it out of your life'. Look at the verse: 'Cast it from thee'. This is painful, the Lord is speaking figuratively of painful loss. He is implying that once you carry out the act and pull out the eye, or cut off the hand, that there's this indignant promptness in the way that you throw it away. You're not looking at it and saying: 'Well, I love that eye. I remember the things, even the good things I did with that hand'. You don't even think about it, the minute you do it there's this promptness, a heedlessness of whatever the cost to feeling or the act of pain is - you throw it away! The Lord is saying: 'I want you, my child, to strike at the root of every unholy thing in your life. It may be painful, but it will be a profitable loss'.

In nature the lizard, I'm led to believe, if you grasp its tail and it suspects that you're going to harm it, it will leave its tail in your hand and run away! When there's a greater danger in view it will leave its tail, although it's a painful loss to it. He says to himself: 'It's better to lose my tail than to lose my life!'. The lobster does the same - if you grab hold of its claw, it will drop the claw just down to the ground and will scuttle away in the hope of safety. Maybe you've played chess at some time in your life - well, if you're a keen chess player

you'll know what a 'gambit' is. A gambit is the sacrificing of a pawn or another piece on the chessboard for the sake of the game. In other words, you may lose even your Queen - one of the highest pieces on the board - but it will be worth the loss of the Queen to win the game!

C.T. Studd was a rich man. He inherited a great fortune from his family, and he was a great cricket player as well. But he left all of his riches and went to the mission field, and do you know what he said? Listen to this, he could say it because he did it: 'If Jesus Christ be God, and died for me, no sacrifice can be too great for me to make for Him'. Jim Elliot who left a wife and a child and went to minister to the Auca Indians and never came back because he was martyred for Christ in his twenties, he said: 'He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose'. Your stumbling block mightn't be mine, my stumbling block mightn't be yours - and I know that there are matters that are strictly sinful, and clearly doubtful, and many things that we really need to ponder and think about, but there are also things that can cause us to sin that are not sins in themselves, and wouldn't cause you to sin or wouldn't cause me to sin. But that's the point of what the Lord is saying: whatever causes you to sin, whether it's a blatant sin or not, if it becomes a scandalon, if it becomes a trap, cut it off, throw it out!

The great theologian Cecil (sp?) was a fine violinist, and I have read recently that he found that his musical talents lured him into unhelpful and undesirable company. So do you know what he did? He took his violin and he smashed it, and he never played it again - lest through the Ear-gate and through the company he could become endangered and entrapped again! You know as well as I do that all musicians don't need to smash their instruments up - in fact the opposite could be the case, that their instrument could be the very thing that they use to bring glory to God. People read about the rich young ruler in Matthew 19 and think that everybody has to give away all their riches in order to be saved, that's not the point of that message at all. The point is this: that was the very thing that was coming between him and Christ, and it had to go! It had to be cast away violently in order that his soul would be saved.

Well, you might sit here and think: 'Well, what's that got to do with me? I know that, I did that when I was converted'. My friend, this is the Lord speaking to His disciples! He is telling His children: 'Cut it out! Throw it out!'. The reason being then you'll get out! Getting out is the third thing He talks about. He says you'll only get out of trouble if you do this. Look at the verses, both of them say: 'it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell'. It's a solemn warning from the Master. Again He uses the word 'hell', as He did in verse 22 - and its again an allusion to Gehenna, that actual place, the rubbish dump at the outskirts of Jerusalem where they tipped all the rubbish and burned the corpses. It was literally a figurative sign of hell fire. The Lord never ever was ambiguous, can I say that again? Do you see the Sermon on the Mount? I don't claim to understand everything about it, but I'll tell you this much: the Lord was never ever ambiguous. When the Lord says 'hell', He means hell! I only seek to say what He said, I don't attempt to soften to blow, I just want to give to you this morning what the Saviour says. He effectively said this, this is what He said: 'It is better to be maimed than to be damned'. It's better to be maimed than to be damned! As one author said: 'It is better to enter into life lame in man's sight, and lovely in God's sight, than to be lovely in man's sight and lame in God's'.

I believe what the Lord is saying is, He is following through one of the principles in this whole sermon that is shockingly visible here, but we often miss it. Do you know what it is? The only basis of spiritual growth is the sacrifice of the natural. The only basis of spiritual growth is the sacrifice of the natural. Listen to what Oswald Chambers says about that very thing: 'If you are going to be spiritual, you must martyr the natural. Sacrifice it! If you say 'I do not want to sacrifice the natural for the spiritual', then Jesus says to you 'You must martyr the spiritual for the natural'. This is not a punishment, but an eternal principle'. Now, what is the Lord saying to His disciples? Let's clear this up: is He saying, as He has done about calling your brother a fool, that your literally going to get hell and go to eternal damnation in the lake of fire, as a Christian, because you do these things? That is not what He is saying, but what He is saying is that the sin that you

commit is guilty of that punishment. We would have gone to hell because of our sin, is that not the case, because of our sin? The Lord says, even when we are saved and Christians, when we continue in those sins we are still committing sins that are worthy of hell - even though, by grace, we escape hell. Do you see it?

The primary purpose of our Lord is to show us the seriousness of sin - and let me say this, that although the believer will escape hell fire in the lake of fire, there is a future fire even for you! Do you know that? I'm not talking about purgatory, I'm talking about what Paul talks of in 1 Corinthians 3:13 where he says this: 'the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is'. That's what Paul says, and the awful tragedy is that it may be that for many Christians everything in their own lives will be burnt up, yet they themselves will be saved. That's what Paul says. Dr Stuart Holden spoke of the possibility of - and this is wonderful - having a saved soul, but a lost life. That's what the Lord is talking about. The Lord is urging us, and I would urge us all today, to get our eternal welfare in view in this lifetime. He wants men to consider their eternity, He wants them to give more time to their eternity, then souls would be converted, then saints would be consecrated if men and women thought of their eternity. The Lord wants us to put eternity in view, to put it in the depths of our heart and in the very recesses of our mind, that our consciences, our behaviour, our actions, our thoughts, our feelings and emotions would all be regulated by eternity! That is why Paul says: 'Judge yourselves, lest ye be judged'.

Why does the Lord use such shocking language in these two verses? It's very simple: He wants us to see the awesome seriousness of our sin. He doesn't just tell it, but if you go to the final chapters of this book you will see that He lives it. Why is He climbing Mount Calvary? Why is He being nailed to a cross? Why is the wrath of God abiding on Him? Why is He dismissing His Spirit, even as the immortal Son of God He dies? Why is He buried as an ordinary man would be buried? Why is it that they mourn over the Son of God? Why? Sin! And the greatest way for us to realise the awesomeness and awfulness of our sin is to think of it in relation to our Saviour, and to think of what it did to Him! One of the most direct roads to holiness is always to consider Him, to consider His suffering and His agony. There's nowhere, no place on earth, that the nature of sin can be displayed in such terrible awful colours as the death of the blessed Son of God at Calvary's cross. What a price He paid for sin! Our sin! That is why Isaac Watt says because of the price He paid for our sin, we ought to pay a price too - pluck out your eye, throw it; cut off your hand, throw it away - for such love demands my soul, my life, my all!

Can I echo a word of warning as we close? If you try to do that on your own, you will fail. You need the Holy Spirit, and Paul said in Romans: 'If ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live' - through the Spirit. He says: 'Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure'. If you, my friend, today decide upon the authority of God's word that you are going to mortify the flesh, you're going to pluck out that eye of sin and cut off that hand of iniquity - I believe that if you come to God as a poor-spirited sinner and plead the power of the Holy Spirit, He will give you the power to do it! If you don't go to the Holy Spirit, you'll make the mistake of the Pharisees and the Scribes, and you'll become a legalist. Listen to the word of Paul: 'Make no provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof'. Make no provision for the flesh, and - just as the engineer will tunnel through mountains, will blow up huge rocks, will bridge the wide chasms to carry his road to its final destination - we, as the believers in Christ, are to be sure that there is no hindrance at all blocking our course to our eternal prize and destination.

You often hear: 'Let go and let God' - oh, that it was as simple as that. It is: 'Let God', but it is this - listen as we close - let God, but mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth. We need to mortify by the Spirit the deeds of the body.

Let us pray. It may be that you're in this gathering and this verse applies to you if you're not converted, for in repentance you have to cut that sin from you and flee from the wrath to come. Christ, at Calvary, is where

you can see what your sin costs. Believer, we're all struggling with sin, aren't we? Some struggling more than others, because we're not struggling at all, we're letting it happen. The only way to be free is to cut that thing from us, whatever is causing us to sin, whatever we're watching, wherever we're going, whatever we're partaking of - sins of the heart, thoughts that we're allowing to linger - we must be ruthless with them and cast them out, for the prize is the price.

Father, help us we pray. We long to be what Christ has asked us to be in this great sermon. We know that that of ourselves is impossible, but we pray that by the Spirit we would mortify the deeds of the flesh, that we would be done with the works of the flesh and put on the Lord Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.

The Sermon On The Mount - Chapter 8

"The Subject Of Divorce"

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Matthew 5:31-32

Now, we have been studying Matthew's gospel chapter 5 in the recent year that has gone by. We have been studying in the Sermon on the Mount, perhaps almost two years ago we were studying the Beatitudes, and then we took a break for a while and we commenced again our studying in the Sermon on the Mount. We've been going through a few verses - we've been interrupted in recent weeks with the start of the new season here in the Assembly, we've been having a week of prayer and we've been ministering around that and so on. We're returning again this week, as announced, to the subject of the Sermon on the Mount - specifically the relation of adultery, which you find in verse 27 right through, and then we find in verses 31 and 32 the subject of divorce.

This is a very controversial subject, and I want to bear my heart before you today to let you understand that I, in no shape or form, want to offend or embarrass anyone. So please do not feel that I am getting at anyone. I don't seek to hurt anyone, or wound those who have already been wounded or touched by this very controversial subject. I can't avoid it, and maybe, in my heart of hearts, if I could avoid it I would. But when you're going systematically through a passage of the word of God, and especially the Sermon on the Mount, you have to do exegetical somersaults and just ignore these verses - and I'm not prepared to do that. The other reason that I'm addressing this subject is I feel it's very important for our young people, maybe many engaged couples and couples going together, that need to know what the scriptures teach with regard to divorce and remarriage.

Let me also say, before we read the word of God: many godly people, many godly commentators, Christian leaders, disagree with what I will say this morning. I believe it with all my heart. I don't say that I know everything about the subject or the word of God from cover to cover, but I seek this morning to deal with it as honestly and as biblically as I can. But understand that I am not saying that other people who don't believe what I believe are unspiritual or ungodly. There are men and women who have been used in mighty ways who do not believe what I will teach from the word of God today. But I must deal with it, and I won't be dealing with it like a sermon as such because we must go through individual scriptures - and therefore it will be quite an analytical study, and I want you to turn to a few verses. But we must, I hope, be of a disposition today to learn and to know what the Lord says.

So let us read from Matthew chapter 5 and verses 31 and 32. We'll read the whole section - verse 27 - in order to get the flow. The Lord Jesus says: "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart. And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell. And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell. It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement: But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife', except, or 'saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery".

One famous commentator of the word of God said these immortal words: 'All history bears witness to the fact that when vital godliness is at a low ebb, the sacred institution of marriage is held in light esteem'. I

repeat: 'All history bears witness to the fact that when vital godliness is at a low ebb, the sacred institution of marriage is held in light esteem'.

If you know the word of God and the gospel writings of the apostles and, indeed the words of the Lord Jesus, you will see that divorce was unhappily a common occurrence in our Lord's time as it is today. It was a matter of controversy and a matter of common discussion. One of the most principle cases of all that can be found in John chapter 4 and verse 18, where you find the woman who was married several times whom the Lord met at the well at Sychar. There the Lord Jesus revealed Himself to her as Messiah, as the Saviour - the One who had to come to deliver Israel and, indeed to deliver all men from their sins. The Lord spoke prophetically to that woman and said: 'For thou hast had five husbands; and he whom thou now hast is not thy husband'.

Although that is a specific case and cannot be seen as the general situation in Palestine in that day, it certainly gives us an illustration how there were similarities with society and certainly with the demise of the institution of marriage. In the few decades before the fall of both the Grecian and Roman empires, marriage was held in such a low esteem that it was a common thing for a woman to keep tabs on her divorces by the number of rings that she wore on her finger. You could count the rings and count how many husbands she had.

Now, what the Lord is first of all saying is He is addressing what He has already said in verses 29 and 30 with regards to plucking out your right eye and cutting off your right hand. He was telling us how to mortify sin. In other words, how to cut sin away from us and, indeed discard it, throw it away so that it wouldn't infiltrate and pollute the rest of the human being. But the Lord, I believe, as He moves away from that illustration, He wants to tell the people who are listening: 'Those offending members that you're to cut off and throw away does not extend to the divorcement of your wives and your husbands'. In other words, you can't just cut off your wife or cut off your husband and discard them, no matter what thorn in the flesh they may be to you. That was opposed to the views of the Jews in that day. You can see that in the Apocryphal writings of Ecclesiasticus 25:26 - and this is one of the reasons why we reject the Apocrypha as not being the word of God. It writes this: 'If your wife go not as you would have her, cut her off from thy flesh, give her a bill of divorce and let her go'. You can see the imagery there, and how men and women could misunderstand the imagery of the Lord Jesus, of plucking out an eye and cutting off a hand.

Josephus, the great Jewish historian of the church said that, in Judaism, divorce was to be given 'for any cause'. Indeed he himself, in his own life and in his own home, was a prime illustration of that because he put away his wife after she had borne him three children because he was not pleased with her behaviour. So you can see how common it was in the Lord's day to divorce your wife. The same as in society today and, sadly, even those within the church are entering into the holy estate of matrimony believing - at the back of their mind or in the depths of their heart - that it is an option to divorce if things go wrong. Sadly we must acknowledge that, that many see it as an open door and an option that they can take if things do not turn out the way they expect them.

I'm led to believe that divorce in 25 year olds and under has soared 500 per cent since the 1970s in our nation. We are told that marriage is out of fashion, and that is embodied in the fact that a quarter of all couples today co-habit - they live together - and they don't get married. Because of this legal predicament, the law courts, the law society in our country are under so much pressure that they want the divorce laws to be relaxed - in fact, for them to be entirely changed. They want it to be the case that there will be no legal battle in court. For that to happen they want the idea of a guilty party to be abolished: that you're not wrong, or your husband wrong, or your wife wrong; and you just want a divorce and you get a divorce. So there's the dropping of the need or the cause for a divorce.

So you can see in our land today, divorce will no longer and is no longer according to whether adultery has been committed or not, but in fact it is permitted if any reason comes out in court. At the moment the law is that if there's a two year separation with the consent of both parties, or indeed a five year separation without the consent of either party, you're divorced. We must note this please, in the church, and you theologians need to realise this: that we are living in a society today that if your partner wants to divorce you, and you don't want divorce, there's absolutely nothing you can do about it. You must acknowledge that, and we must grapple with that within the church of Jesus Christ. Our laws are changing, so much so that what the law wants to bring is: one year's separation and then a divorce for no reason at all. You'll not need to go to court, you'll not need to give a reason, there'll be no cause: you can just have a divorce after one year's separation. So I hope that you can understand the difficult situation that we face today as our laws change from year to year. That is the reason why I feel that we must be aware of the principles that govern marriage and divorce within the word of God.

We must realise that these verses that we're reading today are not the Lord's view on when a divorce is legitimate and when it is not. Don't fall into that trap. The primary reason that the Lord is bringing these verses is to enshrine again in His holy law - the holy law of the Lord Jesus Christ - the holiness of marriage. Whatever your view on divorce is - whether you believe it's legitimate for adultery, or whether you believe it's not legitimate for any case, it doesn't matter - you must concede that the purpose of the Lord saying these words was to enshrine in His holiness the fact that marriage is a holy estate and is not to be broken. Therefore the Lord is guarding us against anything that would encroach upon the peace, the happiness, and indeed the sanctity of the Christian home.

It's natural that the discussion of purity and adultery and so on, in this passage, should lead to the question of divorce. What is the Lord's teaching on divorce? There are four occasions where the Lord Jesus alludes to this subject. I want you to turn to each of them. The first, we have already read, and I want you to look at it in chapter 5 of Matthew and verses 31 and 32. I may - I'm warning you now - I may go on 5 minutes or so longer so don't throw anything at me! Matthew 5:31 and 32, and you see the Lord says: 'It has been said'. Now, there's a debate on about what has been said: is the Lord quoting from scripture here? Is He quoting something that God has said? Well, it's a bit of both in a way because your margin will tell you that the Lord is quoting from Deuteronomy chapter 24 and verse 1. That is included in the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible, which is the law. But the Lord is not quoting from the perfect revealed will of God in the law. What I mean by that is simply this: the Lord is quoting something that was brought into institution by Moses because of the hardness of men's hearts. It is found in Deuteronomy but we will learn, in a moment later, why it's found in Deuteronomy. In verses 31 and 32 of Matthew chapter 5 the Lord mentions the man, He mentions nothing to do with the woman: 'Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement'. In verse 32 also it's in relation to the man, which shows that He's speaking of a certain situation - and He speaks only, in this context, of the conduct of the male in the marriage relationship.

Now, turn to Matthew 19 - Matthew chapter 19 and verses 3 to 9. The Lord speaks again, and He says: 'The Pharisees also came unto him, tempting him, and saying unto him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause? And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder. They say unto him, Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away? He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so. And I say unto you' - distinguishing - 'Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery'.

Now, let me give you a little bit of background. The Pharisees come to Him - verse 3 - and test Him. Why are they testing Him? They are testing Him with the backdrop of two Rabbis, two schools of thought on the subject of divorce that were diametrically opposed. One was Rabbi Shammai and the other was Rabbi Hillel. Rabbi Shammai said that a divorce can only be given upon the cause of adultery - divorce can only be given if adultery has taken place. Rabbi Hillel, on the other hand, broadened it out as far as you like - in fact, for any cause he legitimised the male in the relationship to divorce his wife if she didn't please him. That ranged from adultery, extramarital affairs, right through to if he just went off her, if he didn't find her attractive anymore and even right through to if she burnt the dinner. That was Rabbi Hillel opposed to Rabbi Shammai. So there are two views that the Lord has in the backdrop of what He says. One man says only for adultery, and the other man says for any cause.

Now, I want you note that as the Pharisees come before the Lord and ask this question, they are assuming already that divorce is legitimate. You must see that! They haven't even entered into the possibility that divorce is not legitimate. For that reason, when they come with whatever views they have - whether they followed Shammai or Hillel - the Lord comes and says in verse 9: 'I say unto you, except for fornication', and again He addresses the men, it doesn't mention the women, 'except for fornication' - that's the only reason you can have divorce.

Now, this is very interesting. Look at the reaction of His own disciples in verse 10. His own disciples say to Him: 'If the case of the man be so with his wife' - now, notice they're emphasising this is the case of the man with his wife - 'it is not good to marry'. Now, what are they saying? The Pharisees come assuming that there's some grounds for divorce, whether Shammai is right with adultery or whether Hillel is right for any cause. They come and say: 'What is the reason to divorce your wife?', and the Lord Jesus says: 'I say unto you, don't divorce except for fornication'. His own disciples are astounded at this: 'Lord, what are You saying? If this is the case, it's better not to marry at all. Lord, You're too narrow. You're taking too narrow an interpretation of the word of God'. Now, I want you to remember that please.

Now, turn with me to the third passage where the Lord mentions this subject, in Mark chapter 10 and I want you to notice the difference between Matthew and Mark. Mark chapter 10, and we are going to take time to go through these things today for they're important. Verse 2: 'And the Pharisees came to him, and asked him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife? testing the Lord. And he answered and said unto them, What did Moses command you? And they said, Moses suffered', allowed, permitted, 'to write a bill of divorcement, and to put her away. And Jesus answered and said unto them, For the hardness of your heart he wrote you this precept. But from the beginning of the creation God made them male and female. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife; And they twain shall be one flesh: so then they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder'. Then it goes on verse 10: 'And in the house his disciples asked him again of the same matter'.

Now, I want you to notice that, comparing Mark 10 with Matthew 5 and Matthew 19, the Lord Jesus finishes short of what He said in Matthew's gospel. This is where a great deal of confusion comes in. He reaches the point where He's about to say, in Matthew, that divorce is only allowed upon the exception of fornication, but He doesn't say that in Mark. He stops short of saying it! He makes no pronouncement relative to fornication.

Then, in verse 10 and 11 and verse 12, He does something in Mark's gospel that He didn't do in Matthew. He begins to introduce the case of the woman: 'And in the house his disciples asked him again of the same matter. And he saith unto them, Whosoever shall put away his wife, and marry another, committeth adultery against her. And if a woman shall put away her husband, and be married to another, she committeth adultery'. He didn't address the woman in Matthew 5 or Matthew 19, but all of a sudden in Mark He doesn't mention fornication, He doesn't mention an exception, and He begins to address the woman.

Now, these raise grave questions for us and so does Luke chapter 16 if you turn to it for the last reference of the Lord to this great subject. Luke chapter 16 and verse 18, and the Lord again, like in Matthew, says these words - but again He mentions what He doesn't mention, and He doesn't mention what He mentioned in Matthew. Verse 18: 'Whosoever putteth away his wife, and marrieth another, committeth adultery: and whosoever marrieth her that is put away from her husband committeth adultery'. Verse 19 - the rich man and Lazarus, He stops - no exception. Now, you have to notice this - and please do see - I know I'm going through this rather quickly, but in Matthew 5 and 19 He alone speaks of an exception to divorce. Only in Matthew does He mention 'except', or 'save for the case of fornication'.

Now, go with me in your mind back to Genesis chapter 2. We don't need to turn to it but you will remember there that the marriage bond was instituted. The characteristic of that scene is the dispensation, if you like, of innocence. As it was instituted there was no possibility, as Adam and Eve were there in perfection in the beautiful garden, that it could be broken. There's not even a consideration that the union can be broken, because of their innocence and the lack of sin. Now, often when we come to the question of whether people, believers, are allowed to divorce, and whether they are allowed to remarry, Matthew 5 and Matthew 19 are the texts that people use for the grounds of divorce. But you will find that they believe that the word 'fornication' that you find in verse 32 means 'adultery'. 'Except for fornication', they believe it means 'except for adultery'.

Now, I want to say to you right away that I do not believe that. I do not believe fornication here is understood as adultery, nor includes adultery. Now, I want to spend a little bit of time - and bear with me - in this. The reasons why I don't believe that are these: first of all, if the Lord meant adultery when He said 'fornication', why didn't He say 'adultery'? As you look down at the passage you may ask the question: 'Why didn't He say what He meant?'. In the context of this great subject where precision of words is a vital thing, He used the word 'fornication' and not 'adultery'.

Now, men and women in the age of the Lord Jesus understood and knew the difference, I believe, between fornication and adultery. In John chapter 8 you have the case of the woman caught in the act of adultery, and she's brought before the Lord Jesus. As the Lord Jesus tells her to 'Go away and sin no more', the Pharisees and the Scribes rise up against Him and they make an accusation concerning His birth. They say to the Lord Jesus: 'We were never born of fornication'. In John chapter 8 adultery is mentioned in the context of the woman caught in adultery, but then the Pharisees turn to the Lord and say: 'We were not born of fornication'. Maybe you do believe, if you don't you need to know, that the Pharisees believed that the Lord was born and conceived out of wedlock. In other words, that Mary had slept with someone else apart from Joseph before the two of them were bonded together properly in marriage. They believed - I can't even say the word, but you know what the word is, OK? That's what they believed. They put the tag of fornication upon that act. They distinguished it from adultery that they were talking about already in the passage. Mary had conceived the Lord, they said, in that betrothal period with another man apart from Joseph. They were clear in their mind that fornication meant the sin in the betrothal period. The Pharisees were clear on the difference. I want you to see that: those whom the Lord was speaking to were clear on the difference between fornication and adultery.

Now, many people come and say fornication has a wider meaning in its word. It means illicit sexual sin of every kind, including adultery. Everything under the sun, sexually, that is against God's law, including adultery. I would concur that that is the meaning in certain places of the New Testament scriptures. There's no denying that: it can be used as an umbrella term for extramarital sexual sin - but that is not the question before us today. The question is not how it is used right throughout the scriptures, but rather the prime question is: how does the Lord Jesus use the word 'fornication'? By finding out that, you will find out what He means when He says 'except for fornication' in relation to divorce. I believe, if you look at the word of

God and read, that only three times (Matthew 5, Matthew 15 and Matthew 7) the Lord uses - or it appears - the word 'adultery'. The Lord uses the word 'adultery' and not the word 'fornication' in Matthew 5, 15 and 7. You will find that He actually uses the word 'adultery' in the broad sense. Adultery is not used as the specific act of unfaithfulness outside of marriage. He uses the word 'adultery' as an umbrella term that incorporates much more than simply that extramarital affair of a husband or of a wife. In fact, each case when He is using 'fornication' He uses it, not in an umbrella term, but in the precise term, contrasting to adultery.

Now, let me show you this, it's important. The question before us is this: is fornication wider, including adultery, as some scholars say? The Lord never used 'fornication' once when speaking of wider sexual sin. When He spoke of wider sexual sin He used the word 'adultery', and that shows you and I that He had a narrow definition of fornication. Now, let me show this to you. Matthew 5, that we're already in, He talks about what it's like to look and to lust after a woman - that a man, when he looks and lusts after a woman; what does the Lord say he commits? Adultery! Now, does he commit literal physical adultery? No he doesn't. But the Lord is talking about the mind, so He uses the word 'adultery' as a wider, broader term for sexual sin. He doesn't choose 'fornication', He chooses the word 'adultery'. In Matthew 12 and Matthew 16 the Lord speaks of 'an evil and an adulterous generation'. He's alluding to the wickedness of this old world in which we live. But He's not alluding simply to the act of adultery. He's talking about all the idolatry and the sin and the degradation in this whole world, and He doesn't use the word 'fornication' that many say is a broad umbrella term - He uses the word 'adultery' in a broad sense. When He uses the word 'fornication' He always uses it in a narrow sense. I want you to see that. He uses it in its precise definition and usage.

So therefore we ask the question: is divorce allowed 'except for adultery'? Can you have a divorce if one of your partners has committed adultery? Is that the grounds? The answer is no, my friend! In the light of the word of God, I can see that the answer is no, for adultery was never the grounds of divorce even in the Old Testament. If you go into the Old Testament you find that the consequence of adultery in the Old Testament was that you were stoned. You were stoned to death! That made you free to remarry, why? Because your partner was dead and you could remarry! It was a capital offence. Now, if the Lord Jesus, here in the New Testament, is now making adultery the grounds of divorce I would put before you that the Lord is adding to the scripture, and that is exactly what He condemned the Pharisees for doing: adding to the word of God. Adultery was never the grounds for divorce.

Now, I admit to you - Deuteronomy chapter 24 - why is it there? I'll tell you why. Because the Israelites wouldn't obey God's law with regards to adultery. They wouldn't stone people who had committed it and therefore divorce came in, as the Lord said: 'This was not always so from the beginning but, because of the hardness of your hearts, Moses permitted you divorce'. Don't you get it into your head that God legislated divorce in any way in the Old Testament or in the New Testament.

So what is this 'fornication' if it doesn't mean specifically 'adultery'? Well, I believe the answer is found in Matthew 5 and 19, because it alone is found in Matthew 5 and 19. Now please, you don't need to turn to these verses because I want to bring a whole lot before you, but in Matthew 5 and 19, as I've already said the Lord alone says: 'except for fornication'. He doesn't say it in Mark and He doesn't say it in Luke. Also in Matthew He's unique in that He speaks concerning the man, He doesn't speak concerning the woman. Mark and Luke are unique because they don't legislate for an exception. Now, that's vital! They don't mention 'except for fornication'. However you interpret this whole subject of marriage and remarriage you must not conflict Matthew with Mark and Luke. You mustn't have them contradicting one another. That means that, if they are not contradicting one another, why is Matthew different from Mark and Luke? Why is the Spirit - the Holy Spirit, who inspires the same book, the Bible - why does Mark and Luke leave out this exception clause? Why? I mean, if I could proffer it to you for a moment, the scholars believe that Mark's gospel was the first gospel that was written. If that is so, Mark was circulated in the church before Matthew. If Mark was circulated in a church before Matthew they would have read these words without an exception clause to do

with fornication, then Luke's gospel would have come along without an exception clause to do with fornication, and then one day someone would deliver Matthew's gospel. All of a sudden, those who had staked their life upon the word of God in Mark and Luke realise: 'Oh, there's an exception here. I can give or take a divorce for fornication'. Now, the question, today, before us is this: does the word of God contradict? Does Matthew contradict Mark, and does Matthew contradict Luke?

Now, let me say this: there has to be an explanation. More than that, there must be an explanation in the gospel of Matthew, because the gospel of Matthew is the gospel that is the different one. I think everyone would agree - those dispensational and those who are not - that Matthew's gospel was the gospel that was written primarily for the Jew. Mark and Luke were written for the Gentiles. As you go into Deuteronomy 22 you find fornication there defined as 'playing the whore'. In Matthew chapter 1 you find fornication there in the story of Mary being conceived of the Lord in her womb before the betrothal period was ended. You read the words in Matthew 1:19 and 20: 'Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a public example, was minded to put her away privily. But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost'.

He was mindful in that betrothal period, he thought she was playing the whore! He was mindful to put her away, to divorce her. That is what fornication means in Matthew's gospel. You can see that further in Matthew 19 where the subject of Rabbi Shammai, who believed you could divorce on adultery, or Rabbi Hillel for any cause, that fornication was too narrow for them. Please note that! They were debating among themselves if it was for adultery or if it was just for any cause, and the Lord comes along and He doesn't mention adultery. He says: 'Except for fornication'. They all stand back, and even His own disciples say: 'What? It's better not even getting married!'.

In Israel a woman couldn't get a divorce. That's why Matthew doesn't mention the woman. He speaks only of the male, and in Mark's gospel and Luke's gospel, Gentiles who are being written to have no idea of a betrothal period. They don't have a custom where, like an engagement, for the first year you're bound together in a marriage, but the marriage is not consummated yet - you're not fully married. So they didn't know anything about that. So what's the point in Mark and Luke writing to Gentiles about it? They don't know anything about it, but notice also that they don't have an exception clause. The exception clause has something to do with this betrothal period.

I would get you to look further - don't turn to it - but 1 Corinthians 7. Where does Paul quote from when he talks about marriage? Do you know where he quotes from? He quotes from Mark, he doesn't mention Matthew, he doesn't mention an exception clause. Why? He's writing to Gentiles, and Gentiles cannot commit this particular sin of fornication in a betrothal period that they don't have. Paul, as a Jew, understood that this had absolutely nothing to do with Gentiles.

Now let me say, in the closing moments of our meeting let us lay down - and I'm doing this for your benefit - I'm telling you - I don't have time to go into everything, but I want you to know that I'm not doing this in any way to make you feel uncomfortable. I love you in the Lord. But what I do want our young people to know is this: marriage is permanent! This holy estate is not to be entered into lightly or unadvisedly because it is permanent. Genesis 2:24 that the Lord quotes: 'the two become one flesh'. Malachi 2 and verse 14 - I wish we had time to turn to it, but the story is this: some of the Jews had taken to themselves in captivity - you read about it Ezra and Nehemiah - they put away their wives, they married foreign wives. God told them to put away their foreign wives, and He gave them a reason: because of the wife of your covenant, the wife of your youth. What the Lord is saying is: 'It doesn't matter that you've divorced your Jewish wives and taken to you these other wives. They are still the wives of your youth', as the Lord says, 'the wives of your covenant'. That means this: once you enter into that covenant of marriage, it is permanent! In verse 16, in that same context where the Lord makes those declarations, He says: 'I hate divorce'.

From the start of Genesis, right through to the last book of the Old Testament, Malachi, what you get is that marriage is permanent. Yes, Moses allowed the people to divorce. Why? For the hardness of their heart to prevent further sin. But the law of the Lord said 'No' to divorce within God's framework. Therefore we must not today use the word of God in order to lay down a reason to get divorced. The word of God tells us that marriage is holy, and divorce was only ever permitted for unbelievers.

In Romans chapter 7 Paul again gives the last word: 'For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband'. First Corinthians 7 the same: 'The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth'. The law of the word of God is: you're only released from marriage when your spouse dies. Now, my friends, look, we must spend a little bit more time. I must spend this time - forgive me.

There are laws today that make it very, very difficult to implement these scriptures - for you can be divorced of whether you like it or not. So whether divorce is wrong or not, your spouse can divorce you whether you like it or not. We've got to grapple in this Hall with these things from the word of God. But let me say this categorically, I don't have all the answers but what I do know is this:

One: Divorce was permitted in Israel for the hardness of their heart - the church of Jesus Christ is not Israel and their hearts shouldn't be hard.

Two: It only applies to the betrothal period, because we find it in Matthew's gospel.

Three: It's only mentioned in Matthew to the male because in Judaism (and it's specifically to Judaism) there was no law of the wife. They had no say.

Four: The Lord uses 'fornication', and not the word 'adultery'.

Five: Mark and Luke are to Gentiles, and the exception is omitted.

Six: Paul never quotes Matthew or the exception clause used in Matthew 5:19. If that's what those verses mean it makes all of Paul's writings and all the rest of the New Testament void.

Seven: The law I've last mentioned - Paul's last word in scripture, the revelation, is: 'No divorce'.

You've got it right throughout and I could add more things. There's Ephesians 4 - that we are to forgive one another; 1 Corinthians 6 - we're not to take one another to court. My friends, I know that there are many hard questions - and I am not for one minute saying that a woman should take a beating for the rest of her days, or should have a husband running around with every female under the sun. I am not saying that. All I am doing is trying to present to you what God has revealed with regards to marriage and remarriage and divorce.

Now, let me say this please, bear with me: the disciples had to walk a narrow road and we must walk that road today. But note, in individual cases - in individual cases - the Lord Jesus Christ revealed Himself to people in this situation. People who are divorced and remarried - whether you think it's a sin or not a sin, I'll tell you this: the Lord says if you lust after a woman in your heart and your head you're guilty of adultery. We are falling down where this is concerned, but what I want to bring to you today is this: when the Lord came to a woman caught in adultery He said, 'Go and sin no more'. There is forgiveness! Oh, there is forgiveness! Beware: this doesn't justify you going down an unscriptural road of divorce and remarriage. But let me tell you this: the Lord Jesus - and do you believe this, saints today, as we preach to a dying world and a compromising church? Do you believe this? 'All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven you'.

As we close, we need to have hearts of grace, hearts of compassion to a world around that are affected by these things, people in our own assembly perhaps that are touched by these things. We need to have grace toward them. Do you know why? 'Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners shall inherit the

kingdom of God; and such were some of you, but ye are washed, ye are sanctified, ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of God'. Praise His name! There is grace that is greater than all our sin! Hallelujah!

Our time has run away. Get the tape and go over it slowly, because I know I was like a train there this morning, but I wanted to give you all that for your benefit and your exhortation.

Let us pray together - please bring folks back tonight, I'll not preach as long as that tonight, don't worry about that! Let us pray, let us pray for our young people, let us pray for our young married people. Let us pray for us all - for, if the truth be told, we're all touched and affected with this in our families and maybe in our past. But praise God, there's a sympathising, compassionate Redeemer who's full of grace. Hallelujah!

Father, we thank You for the Saviour. We thank You for the truth of God that has not changed since the beginning of time: 'From the beginning this was not so'. But yet Lord we thank You for Your truth that guides us today, but yet we acknowledge that many of us have failed. Many of us in our mind, or even literally and practically, have committed sins that we wish we could forget. But thank You Lord that they're beneath the blood if we're redeemed. If we're saved they're gone as far as the east is from the west, and they're buried with Christ. Oh Lord, may the joy of our Redeemer and redemption fill us today. Not a critical spirit, not a condemnatory judgmental view but, Lord, the grace of God that is greater than all of our sin. Hear us today we pray, and bless us now in the Saviour's name. Amen.

The Sermon On The Mount - Chapter 9

"Nothing But The Truth"

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Matthew 5:33-37

Now we're turning again to Matthew's gospel and chapter 5. If you're visiting with us, in the fellowship here on Lord's Day mornings we've been going through the Sermon on the Mount. We have had quite a lengthy break from it in recent days, and we began it again last week looking at the Lord's teaching on divorce. So that brings us to verse 33 of chapter 5, and we'll take up the words of our Lord there.

Verse 33 of Matthew chapter 5, and the Lord Jesus says: "Again, ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths: But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne: Nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King. Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black. But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil".

So, our subject today we have entitled: 'Nothing but the Truth'. On one occasion there were two brothers who were very rich. Those two brothers were as wicked as they were rich. Both lived wild unprofitable existences, using their wealth to cover-up the dark sides of their lives. On the surface you would never have guessed it, for both of them were committed members of a church. They both attended the same church every Sunday, and in fact gave large sums of money to the church projects. On one occasion the church that they belonged to called a new pastor. He was a man who preached the gospel and the truth of God with zeal and courage, and before long the attendance within that assembly grew so much that they needed a larger building. But that pastor was no fool, being a man of keen judgement, insight and strong integrity, he saw through the hypocritical lifestyles of the two brothers. All of a sudden, out of the blue, one of the brothers died. The new pastor was asked to preach at his funeral, and the day before the funeral the surviving brother pulled the pastor aside and handed him an envelope. 'There's a cheque in here that is large enough to pay the entire amount of the need for your new sanctuary', he whispered, 'All I ask is one favour: tell the people at the funeral that he was a saint'. The pastor gave the brother his word, and he said: 'I will do precisely as you asked me'. That afternoon he went along to the bank and deposited the cheque into the church's account, and the next day the pastor stood before a great congregation and before the coffin, and said with firm conviction these words: 'This man was an ungodly sinner, wicked to the core. He was unfaithful to his wife, hot-tempered with his children, ruthless in his business, and a hypocrite in the church - but compared to his brother he was a saint'.

Now one of the strange parallels that we have with that story and the words of our Lord Jesus, and indeed with the whole Sermon of the Mount as the Lord preaches it, is that often our Lord Jesus is reminding the Jews of things that they already knew. It was no secret to the Jews that they shouldn't commit adultery, it was no secret to them that they shouldn't murder or hate - and now, as we come to the matter of truth and telling lies, of course these Jewish people believed what the Lord Jesus was telling them. So, in some instances, He was telling them what they already knew. If you look into the history books you will find in Jewish theology that telling the truth was of paramount importance to all Jews, and especially to the Jewish teachers.

We thought last week, in relation to divorce, of two rabbis - one called Rabbi Shammai, and one Rabbi Hillel. Rabbi Shammai believed that you could have a divorce on the cause of adultery, Rabbi Hillel believed

for any cause. But Rabbi Shammai, as all of the rabbis, didn't just talk about divorce, adultery and remarriage, but he also talked about the truth. He believed, with regards to truth, that the person who believes in God is so wedded to the truth that they are forbidden from even giving ordinary courteous politenesses. What I mean is this: you go along to a wedding, it is a courtesy to say to the bride: 'You're looking wonderful today' - but Rabbi Shammai said that if that wasn't the truth you ought not to say it, and if she's looking ugly you ought to tell her she's ugly. You wouldn't get invited to too many weddings, and I wouldn't get invited to do many!

It reminds me of the story of the teacher, Mrs Fisher, recovering from surgery, and she got a card from her class that read: 'Dear Mrs Fisher, your class wishes you a speedy recovery by a vote of 15 to 4' - blatant honesty! We as Christians - I don't know about you, but in everyday life we grapple with this: when is a lie a lie, when is the truth all the truth and nothing but the truth? Indeed, one writer says: 'If the Rabbis tended to be permissive in their attitude to divorce, they became permissive also in their teaching about oaths'. This again is another example of how the rabbis took the word of God, the Old Testament Scriptures, and deviously twisted them in order to allow them to sin as much as they could.

Now, I want us to look very frankly at these words of the Lord Jesus. Look at verse 33 first of all, the Lord says: 'Ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths'. Now that's the first thing I want you to note: that is an Old Testament law. The Lord, as He often does in this sermon, brings before the Jews an Old Testament law - and this, if you like, is the Lord's text, the word of God that He is reading from. Now it's not a direct quotation, but it's an allusion to Leviticus 19:12 where people were told not to forswear themselves. Leviticus 19 is, if you like, an application of the third commandment in Exodus 20 verse 7 which tells us not to take the name of the Lord our God in vain.

So, the Lord is alluding to an Old Testament law, a law that speaks of the false use of the name of God. The law, the third commandment, that says a false use of the name of God is the equivalent of taking God's name in vain. Specifically what Leviticus 19 is talking about, and what our Lord is alluding to, is to swear solemnly. In other words, to swear solemnly in the Old Testament was to appeal to God as your witness, but to forswear meant to swear falsely - to state that black was white and white was black. In other words: to state that something is true when you know fine well that the thing is false - that was to forswear, to falsely swear.

Now, here is where these problems came in: by the Jew swearing by the name of God, he was actually bringing God into the agreement to be a witness. God is being brought into the matter, and when God is being brought into any matter it can be no light matter. Gradually in Judaism it came to be widely accepted that if an oath did not actually, in word, contain the divine name of God, it need not be binding. Have you got that? The law of God says that if you swear by the name of God, if you bring God into your agreement of truth, you better not forswear, you better honour the word that you have spoken. That's very binding, very serious. So, the Jews decided in their mind: 'Well, here's the thing to do, here's the way to get out of it, here's the loophole - don't bring God into it! Don't bring God's name into it, and then your word will no longer be binding - you can tell a bit of a white lie'. Your word could become easily discarded, and they thought: 'Well, if I swear by heaven, if I swear by the earth, if I swear by Jerusalem, if I even swear upon my own head' - some of those were the most common things to swear by in those days - 'if I swear by anything but the name of God, I'm off the hook'. But I want you to notice this: the rightful swearing of an oath in the Old Testament, swearing by the name of God and fulfilling what you have sworn, was one of the highest forms of worship that we find in the Old Testament Scriptures. It was worship!

So, there is an Old Testament law - the text that the Lord alludes to. The second thing I want you to notice is a Jewish lie: how the Jews take that text and they twist it, they twist the law to suit their own compromises

and sinfulness. In verse 34 the Lord alludes to it: 'I say unto you' - the law has said this, but I'm going to go a bit further and say - 'Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne: Nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King' - God - 'Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black'. I want you to come with me to Palestine in the Lord's day. A scholar called Thompson in his book, 'The Land and the Book', says this: 'This people' - the Jewish people - 'are fearfully profane. Everybody curses and swears when in passion, no people that I have ever known can compare with these Orientals for profaneness in the use of the names and attributes of God. The evil habit seems to be universal'.

So you can see and understand the backdrop of the words of the Lord Jesus. Swearing, profaneness, oaths and curses in passion and even in everyday usage was so common that it had become a serious concern of some Jewish teachers. Now what are these oaths that these Jewish people were taking? Well, I have divided them for you into two oaths. First there was the frivolous oath-taking - that is taking an oath when an oath was not needed to be taken. That was a very serious matter: using an oath when you didn't need to, and this was becoming so common. People would say: 'By your life I'll do this', or 'By my life I'll do this', or 'By my head I'll do it', or 'Upon my own head be it if I do not to it'. Do these sound familiar? 'May I never see the comfort of Israel and Jerusalem if I do not fulfil my word to you', and you can almost see the Jews with their hands up saying this to one another. Frivolous oath-taking - they didn't need to take these oaths, but they were doing it everyday of their lives.

Then also there is evasive swearing or oath-taking. Evasive: when you're swearing in order to avoid something. As I said to you already, the Jews divided oaths into two classes. There was the oath that is absolutely binding - that is the oath that you bring God into - and then there is the other oath that is not binding because you haven't brought God's name into the transaction, He's not a partner in the whole deal. Therefore, if God's name is used you better do what you've said; and if God's name is not used, well you can get away with a wee white lie.

Now, here's the Lord's teaching, this is the Lord's teaching: no oath, indeed no man, can keep God out of any transaction of truth. Have you got it? The Lord is saying: 'Just because you leave God's name out of the matter doesn't leave God out of it, for God is in the issue of truth and untruth, of lying and truth!' God is already there! Just avoiding His name is absolutely useless, God is already there! You don't bring God into your decision! He says that by saying: 'You might swear by heaven, but where is God? In heaven! For heaven is God's throne'. The earth is God's footstool, if you swear by earth you're still swearing by God because God is in the earth. If you swear by Jerusalem, it is the city of the great King, and God dwells there so you're swearing by God. Then if you swear by your head, He says you can't even turn one of your hairs black or white - and some of you would like to do that - but you can't even do that! You don't have the power to do that, but God alone has the power to do it.

Here the Lord makes clear to us a very important spiritual lesson, and I want you to learn this this morning. Listen, a great eternal truth that we as the children of God today of this dispensation must learn, what is it? Life, your life, my life, all of life cannot be divided into compartments. You can't do it! You can't say: 'Well, this area of my life God is involved in, but all the others He's not', or 'All these areas God is involved in, but this little one He is not'. The Lord is saying that there cannot be any kind of language in the church and then another kind of language in the factory or in the office. There can't be one standard of behaviour in the assembly and another standard of ethics in the business world. The fact is that our God does not need to be invited into the areas of our lives, and our God cannot be kept out of other areas of our lives - do you get it? He is everywhere, He is through life, He is through every activity. He hears not just the words where we use His name in a swear or an oath, He hears every single word that is spoken by our mouths. He sees, hears, and knows everything!

Boy, if we really believed that how that would change our behaviour, our conversation, the way that we live our lives everyday. So you can see the Old Testament law the Lord is alluding to, and you now see how the Jews took this law and thought that by avoiding the name of God they could swear and then not fulfil their obligations - how the Jews lied about even this and twisted it! Now here's the third thing, the final thing, and I want to spend a bit of time on this. The Lord says to His own people, His disciples, to us today in verse 37 - so what do you do then about this matter? The Lord says: 'Let your communication be, Yes, yes; No, no: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil'. Now, what does the New say? What is the Lord saying? How is He commenting about this matter of oaths?

The Lord is not saying: 'Don't swear falsely', He is saying: 'Don't swear at all!'. Let me say first of all that I believe the Lord is speaking about the flippant oath habit, I believe the Lord is speaking specifically to the context of what He's been saying: swearing by heaven, swearing by the earth, swearing by Jerusalem, swearing by your own head. Don't swear like that at all! He alludes to Isaiah 66 and Psalm 48, and it amazes me as I've been going through the Sermon on the Mount - before I elaborate on what I've just said - it amazes me how the Lord uses His Bible so much, so much. His usage of the Old Testament - and that's what we must do as we're asking the question: how do we implement this truth in our life today?

Here's the big question that's probably in your mind: is the Lord forbidding the taking of a solemn oath in a secular court? Is that what the Lord is saying? Are we not allowed to take oaths today in any shape or form? There were some very godly men and women who believed this: the Essenes, who were a Jewish sect, believed that you shouldn't take oaths; the Quakers in our society and our generation believe it, and still believe it today; George Foxe, who wrote the book of martyrs, he would only go as far as to say to somebody 'Verily', which is an old word for 'truly' - 'Verily I'll do it'. In fact there was a saying going around in George Foxe's day: 'If George Foxe says 'Verily' there is no altering him'. So you have many Christians, a Jewish sect - the Essenes, you have the Quakers, you have George Foxe, you have believers perhaps even in this assembly - and it's not my intention to offend you today - but I want to ask: what do the Scriptures say? Are these people correct in this assumption?

Let me first of all say this: the Old Testament does permit oath-taking, and we've laid that down already. What it does not permit is false oath-taking. Let me go further: God Himself swears - God swears! In Genesis 9 and 11 God swears never ever to bring a universal flood upon the earth, and He gives a promise of that oath - He puts it in the sky as a rainbow. In Luke chapter 1 and verse 73 we have there recorded by Luke the doctor that God swore that He would provide and send a redeemer to the Jews. In Acts chapter 2 and verses 27 to 31 you have him quoting the Old Testament Psalms where God swore that He would raise His Son from the dead, He would not let Him see corruption. There are many more Scriptures that I could outline for you today where God pictures Himself as swearing an oath to His people.

Now what is that swearing? That swearing is not in order to convince us that God is telling the truth, God is truth - He is the epitome and absolute of all truth. But God swearing these things is to encourage these truthfulnesses to our hearts, to make them more solemn to us, to make them more sure to us, that we may - in our faithlessness - step out upon them. If you don't believe me - I'm getting some funny looks from down there in the congregation - turn with me to Hebrews chapter 6. We must be honest with scripture as we look at this subject, Hebrews chapter 6 and verse 17: 'Wherein God, willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability', or the unchangeableness, 'of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath'. There you have it in black-and-white! God, in order to convince you and I of His unchangeableness, in other words - speaking specifically to Jews here, but it can be applied to us all - if God said He's going to save us, He's going to save us. To show us that, not in order to make Him do it as if He would want to get out of it some day - that's not the reason He swears by an oath, but to show us that He is absolutely in earnest He swears by an oath.

For that reason the Mosaic code forbade only false or irreverent oaths, profaning God's name - for if you brought God into the matter and then you didn't fulfil the oath, you were taking His name in vain. Let me take you into the New Testament, the Lord Jesus Himself consented to being put under oath in Matthew 26 verses 63 and 64, Caiaphas said to Him: 'I adjure thee by the living God', that was the most solemn Jewish oath that you could be put under. Now I know that the Lord didn't say it, but the fact that the Lord answered Caiaphas - and you remember that there were occasions when He was crossed questioned that He didn't answer, and it was His prerogative not to answer here but He answered under that oath. The Lord!

You have God in the Old Testament - Paul writing, probably, in Hebrews. Then you have the Lord Jesus. If you go to 2 Corinthians - you don't need to turn to it - chapter 1 verse 23, also Galatians 1 verse 20, you have Paul the apostle who took an oath, as it were, put himself upon oath. He invoked the name of God to prove that he was telling the truth. This confuses us, perhaps, but you see what we fail to see often is that, by the Lord Jesus' time that we're reading this Sermon on the Mount, the Jews had built up an entire legalistic system around what was a perfectly feasible Old Testament teaching. They devised ways to swear without using God's name therefore, as they saw it, evading the responsibility of telling the truth. Swearing had now become, in Jesus' day, a justification for lying! Do you see that?

This is something that the Lord could not allow among His followers - a justification for lying. So Jesus simply abolishes these oaths. Now let me say this, it's important because I know that some of you may disagree with me and that's your prerogative to do so, but there are two principles of interpretation that we must always remember when we're looking into the word of God. First is this: apparent absolute statements are not always understood absolutely - apparent absolute statements are not always understood absolutely, but have to be understood in the context wherein they are written. Let me give you an example, Paul says in 2 Corinthians: 'I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some'. Now does 'all' mean 'all'? Of course it does, 'all' means 'all' - but does that mean that Paul became a blasphemer to the blasphemer, Paul became an adulterer to the adulterer, a drunkard to the drunkard? Of course it doesn't! It means in the capacity whereby a Christian could become all things to all men, therefore he did not become a blasphemer, he did not become a drunkard. The language has a limitation, it has a limitation.

The second principle is that when something is forbidden in one passage, like Matthew chapter 5, but allowed in another passage, it's obvious that a certain use or a certain mode of that thing is forbidden - not the prohibition of the whole thing altogether, regardless of the context. Now what is the Lord speaking of? If God swore by oath in the Old Testament, if the Lord Jesus was put under oath in the New Testament, if Paul does it on occasions right through the epistles, and Hebrews says that God swore to us about our salvation under an oath - what does the Lord mean when He says: 'Swear not at all'? Well, look at it, verse 34: 'But I say unto you, Swear not at all;' - and look, a semicolon introducing, 'neither by heaven; for it is God's throne: Nor by the earth; for it is his footstool', and so on. He's saying swear not at all in this way, and then in verse 37 He's saying: 'If you're going to use swearing for lying, you'd be better not to swear at all - just tell the truth'.

Now, the act of 1888 legally entitles you in court to affirm rather than swear - so let every man be convinced in his own mind, I'm not going to tell you what to do and you're not going to - hopefully - tell me what to do. That's what I believe the Scriptures teach, but you do whatever your conscience teaches. But here's the question to us today: how do we fare in this matter of truth? Now I'd be interested to ask any of you who don't believe in taking oaths: did you just affirm at your wedding ceremony? Have you ever been in court to take an oath, and have you kept that oath of truth that you took? Did you tell the truth? Did you keep your oath there at the altar as you came together, man and wife, have you kept that oath? What about the oath of public office? Some people in here may hold that oath. Maybe it's the oath after a meeting of consecration, where the word of God is preached and you as a believer are encouraged to come and give all to God and put all on the altar to God - have you vowed that to God? Have you paid it? These are grave question that we must answer - how do we fare? Have we kept them?

I want to spend a moment or two just before we finish practically looking at the subject of how we fare as Christians with the subject of truth. What about our flippancy in our speech? That was one of the oaths that these Jews were using: flippancy about the name of God and the things of God. I wonder at times how unthinkingly and unblushingly we Christians use swearing expressions! You might say: 'Who's been using swearing expressions?'. Well, let me give you a few of them: 'By Jove' - did you know that 'Jove' is a Greek god? 'By Jove', you can't say 'By God' because people would raise their eyebrows, but you can get away with it like that. That is exactly the same as when the Jews substituted the name of God for Jerusalem, or for the earth, or for their head. Some people say: 'God knows', or 'Good heavens', or 'Good Lord'. Now, I know that we don't mean anything by these things - but these things of themselves mean a great deal!

The Jews didn't mean anything when they said these things, they thought it was getting them out of a thing. They weren't being serious, but God in the Lord Jesus Christ condemns this. I'm not talking about words of humour, or foolish words, or jovial words - we need to have a bit of banter now and again. Some of you can sometimes be so sour-faced that you don't laugh at a joke! That's not what the Lord is talking about here, but what He is speaking of is speaking flippantly with holy, reverent things. Parents, what about in the home life? Maybe a parent makes a promise, do you keep it? What about a threat you make, do you carry it out? Then, perhaps, when you don't carry it out or keep your promise, you wonder why your word has no weight with the children and then we wonder why in society there is indiscipline all around.

What about in business life? How often are employees expected to say things or do things which they know right well are wrong things, yet they're afraid to dare to refuse to do it in case they lose their job! This is serious, isn't it? The word of God would teach: 'Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you' - and if you study His business, that's what the verse is saying, if you study God's business He'll look after your business. I know it's hard. What about insincerity in our social lives? That could be divided into many things, but one of them can be flattery. Now I'm not talking about encouragement, a pat on the back, saying well done - that's needed greatly today. But what I am talking about is something not helpful but hateful, something that is for your own good to flatter someone, to be in with them or to get something from them.

What about falsity, or you could put it: hypocrisy? We're sitting in the front room, you're talking about your neighbour and you're giving them this, and that, and the other with your words - and then all of a sudden there's a knock on the door, who is it? 'Oh, I'm so glad to see you! How are you doing?' - hypocrisy! You can look at it as scandal-mongering - 'Oh, Christians wouldn't do the like of this' - I think Christians should go into the Olympics for this! Some of them are that good at it! Some of them, when they gather at houses for coffee, that's all they spend their time doing! This is serious stuff: backbiting within the church. Do you know what Oswald Chambers says? I know it's hard to be talked about, I know that - it's bad to talk about others, but it's hard to be talked about and you want to rush to defend yourself. Do you know what Chambers said: 'Scandal should be treated the way you treat mud on your clothes. If you try to deal with it when it's wet you rub the mud off into the texture, but if you leave it till it's dry you can flick it off with a touch - it's gone without trace! Leave scandal alone, never touch it'. Who cares what they say about you? If we had time we could go into what they said about the Lord Jesus: a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners, a glutton - look at Him! Look who He's with! What does it say of Him? He made Himself of no reputation, He didn't run after them defending His name.

What about irreverence in the life of faith? Think of some of the jokes that are permitted and we permit concerning the Bible, concerning words of Scripture, concerning stories or even lines of hymns - we've got to take these things seriously! What about the solemn words that we have sung this morning, the things that we say in our prayers publicly - and we perhaps sing without paying the slightest attention to what we are doing, or what we are saying. We're singing: 'All hail the power of Jesus name', when really all you're

interested in, madam, is the splendour of the colour of your sister's hat! Is that where we're living, is it? Is that the level of our spirituality? Do we say things and not mean them? Preachers and teachers, how often do we fudge evidence to make a point, or to dogmatise in areas that we know nothing about - or perhaps in areas that 'Everybody's always believed this, therefore I better toe the line'? What about that? What about the preacher that writes in the corner of his notes: 'Shout loudly, weak point'? Isn't that right?

Let me tell you: all of these things can be encapsulated around what is the biblical definition of lying. Lying! What does the Lord say? What do we do? As we close, verse 37: 'Let your communication be, Yes, yes; No, no'. What's He saying? He's not saying you don't take official oaths when you need to in an evil world, that's not what He's saying. He's saying you, as a Christian, shouldn't need to take oaths! It shouldn't be necessary in the kingdom - whether in the future millennial kingdom or now in those members of the kingdom. As someone said: 'A gentleman's word is as sure as his oath' - and I put that to you today, a Christian's word is as sure as his oath too! We should speak truthfully, honestly, as if we were under oath. Oaths or swearing should be completely unnecessary! Our speech should be untarnished, unembellished - it should be a clear yes or no!

In Casablanca, during World War II, Winston Churchill met Roosevelt to discuss the plan of war. At the conclusion of the sittings Mr Churchill volunteered to incorporate the British undertakings in a treaty, but the President's response was in these words: 'No thank you, your words are good enough for me'. I think that must be one of the greatest tributes to Winston Churchill ever: 'Your word is good enough for me'. That is the believer, that's the believer - the Lord says: 'Whatsoever is more than these comes of evil'. In other words, if you have to swear it's either because you're not trustworthy to tell the truth, or the person doesn't trust you to tell the truth. The mistrust is either in you or the other person - and that's why the Lord says: 'If you have to swear it comes of evil'. Let me go further: that is the reason why we are required to swear in a court of law today, because we live in an evil world - that's why we do it. And I would put to you that there's something wrong if a Christian refuses to do it.

The evil lies within, but let us beware most of all of an evil: lying against God. What did the Lord say to the Pharisees? We could go and look at many passages where He castigates the Pharisees for these things: 'Ye honour me with your lips, but your heart is far from me'. Horatius Bonar, that godly man, put those words into a hymn, a prayer from his own heart. He said this:

'Help me, my God, to speak
True words to Thee each day.
Real let my voice be when I praise,
And trustful when I pray.

Thy words are true to me,
Let mine to Thee be true.
The speech of my whole heart and soul,
However low and few'.

Oh, God says to us as His people today: 'Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord, but they that deal rightly and truly are His delight'. Do you remember the words of the Lord? 'Every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgement!' We thought recently of Eye-gate as the Lord pictured a man looking on a woman lustfully - Eye-gate, that is what we let in. But now the Lord is speaking to us today of Mouth-gate, what we let out. Oh, I pray - you know gossip is a cancer in this church, because it's a cancer in every church. You go home today and get on your knees and pray David's prayer: 'Set a watch, oh Lord, before my mouth, keep the door of my lips'.

Let's bow our heads together, and if you're guilty of this sin - join the club, because we're all guilty of it! What we have to do is confess it. You could be here, and maybe not guilty of this sin in particular, but guilty of never ever coming to Christ. Why don't you come to Him today? The blood that is able to cleanse the believer of this sin is able to cleanse you of all sin, forever, Amen. So why not come to Him today in simple faith and take that gift of salvation?

Father, we thank Thee for a clear-cut speaking Saviour, a Saviour who did not mince His words - though they were filled with grace, they were filled with truth. We pray as Thy people and as His disciples, that we will be enabled in this day of lying, this day of spin, this day of economy with the truth, that we will say 'Yes, yes; No, no' - and let the facts and our character be enough to speak truth. These are hard things, our Father, and we have all failed - and I confess my sin. We pray that You would help us from today, by the grace and by the Spirit of God, to live right in Christ Jesus. Bless us now as we go, in His name we pray, Amen.

The Sermon On The Mount - Chapter 10

"Turn The Other Cheek"

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Matthew 5:38-42

Now we're turning to Matthew's gospel again and chapter 5 - Matthew chapter 5, and we're reading today from verse 38 through to 42. These are the words of our Lord Jesus Christ: "Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain. Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away".

Let's bow our heads for a moment's prayer: Our Father, we come before Thee and before the words of Thy blessed Son, our Lord Jesus. Lord, these words are hard to read, let alone meditate upon and implement into our sinful lives. Therefore to that end we pray that You'll give us grace today to understand the word of God and, indeed, to apply it and implement it into our lives. Lord, we believe that this sermon is not meant to be preached as much as meant to be lived. Therefore we pray that the preaching of it would add to the living of it in the life of the people gathered here today. Fill me with Thy Spirit I pray, and come by Thy Holy Spirit to minister to us and speak to us. For Christ's sake, and for His glory alone. Amen.

A successful Irish boxer on one occasion was converted, and he grew in faith and became a preacher of the gospel. He happened to be in a new town setting up his evangelistic tent, and a couple of tough thugs noticed what he was doing. Knowing nothing of the evangelist's background, they made a few insulting remarks to him. The Irishman merely turned and looked at them. Pressing his luck, one of the bullies took a swing and struck a glancing blow on one side of the ex-boxer's face. He shook it off and said nothing as he stuck out his jaw to him again. The fellow took another glance and blew him on the side of the cheek. At that point, the preacher swiftly took off his coat, rolled up his sleeves and announced: 'The Lord gave me no further instructions' - bang!

Now believe it or not, that is the way many people view the Sermon on the Mount and, indeed, view these verses that we read together today. I would say that nowhere is the challenge greater in this sermon than in these few verses that we have read today. In verse 38 the Lord again, as He does right throughout this sermon, goes back to the Old Testament law. He quotes these words that we know all too well - even proverbially in society - 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth'. If you go to Exodus 21, Leviticus 24 and Deuteronomy 19 you will find there in the law those words. Those words that the Lord quoted from the Old Testament were both a command to punish, but I want you also to see that it was a limitation on punishment. 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth' was telling people that punishment was necessary. If you pluck out someone's eye, your eye should be plucked out. If you knock out their teeth, your tooth should be knocked out. So it was a command to punish.

But you see, what people often miss - Christians and, indeed, society at large that scorns this law: 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth' - is that not only is it a command to punish, but it is a limitation on punishment. What God is saying in the Old Testament is: 'The penalty must not exceed the crime'. So in order to command to punish, it also says you mustn't punish too hard, over and above the crime that has been committed. You see, what happened in Old Testament times, or what ought to have happened, is that this law

kept people from forcing the offender to pay a greater price than the offence he committed deserved. Another thing it did was it prevented people from taking personal revenge. So don't scorn this law in the Old Testament too quickly. But what I want you to note, before we go on any further, is that according to the Old Testament scriptures and the law, authority for punishment was vested in government. That is important!

You must remember that the first five books of the Bible are not just a spiritual Old Testament, like we have our spiritual New Testament. The Pentateuch was the law of the land that was to be implemented in that Jewish Israelite society. It is not given to the individual. Therefore this law: 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth', was not for private vengeance. It wasn't for you as an individual, or me as an individual, living in Judaism in the Old Testament society. But rather it was a direction for the magistrates and for the judges and the leaders in Israel. But what I want you to see is: what the Scribes and the Pharisees in the Lord Jesus' day did with these verses of Old Testament writ. They took them - meant to be applied to the authorities and society - and they extended those principles of just retribution to individuals. I hope you can see that transition. They extended these principles of just retribution from the law courts, where it belonged, to the realm of personal relationships, where it did not belong.

These verses are misunderstood today because many people think that the Lord Jesus is prohibiting the administration of justice in society. That is not what the Lord is prohibiting here by bringing us His new law in the Sermon on the Mount. What the Lord is saying is, indeed, the spirit of the law in the Old Testament: 'You are not to take the law into your own hands'. So He says: 'Resist not evil'. Now, He is not thinking - let me implore you to understand this - He is not thinking of judicially or nationally, but He's thinking individually. Now why am I emphasising that? Simply this: the Lord Jesus is not teaching that nations are to discard their armies, or their navies, or their police forces, or their judges, or to open the gates of all the prisons and let people out. Nations as nations are not yet in the Kingdom of God! Therefore the laws of the Kingdom do not apply to them as nations. It would do you well to, in your life as you read the word of God and understand the word of God, not to apply Christian principles to a non-Christian world, because then you have confusion.

The Lord Jesus is teaching this sermon, and if any nation in this world - I'd vouch to say to you - implemented these laws as national laws in the society that we live in, filled with sin and not under the rule of the Lord Jesus Christ, there would be absolute collapse of all institutions and chaos within society! Thank God there's a day coming when all nations will be members of the Kingdom of God, and the kingdoms of this world shall become the Kingdom of our God and His Christ. But I want you to see the distinction here: the Lord Jesus is speaking to His disciples. He is not speaking of national laws, but He is speaking of individual responsibilities of believers in Christ.

Now, in order that you don't misunderstand me when I say that, and in order that we lay a proper foundation I want you to turn to Romans chapter 12. Romans chapter 12 and verses 19 to 20, and we'll not take time to read them but if you just glance down at them you will see that Paul illuminates on the principles that I've just been speaking about. He says, instead of avenging ourselves for any wrong that's been done to us we are to 'give place unto wrath'. That means 'let way' and 'give way' for God's wrath. God's word says in this passage, Paul quoting the Old Testament: 'I will repay'. He will deal with a person and with a matter that we have been wronged in. Our part, Paul says, is to act kindly and generously toward our enemy. By doing so we 'heap coals of fire' on his head, or maybe we cause his mind to burn with shame - but we are not allowed, ourselves, to overcome by evil the evil that has been done to us. Quite the contrary, we are to overcome evil by good! Now, that is the sentiment of individual responsibility between you and your brother, between you and another.

But then if you know the word of God and are familiar with it, if you go to Romans chapter 13 this time, you will see how Paul doesn't want us to misunderstand who this applies to. Now, we have to realise that many

people - Christians - take the words of the Authorised Version in Matthew 5 where the Lord says: 'Resist not evil', and they take it to awful literal extremes. They take it to the extremes of uncompromising pacifism, where it's never ever right to take up force in any shape or form - whether it be a government or whether it be from the point of freedom fighting. In fact, Luther says one of the most absurd instances of this was seen in a man who he calls 'the crazy man'. He describes him like this: 'This man let the lice nibble at him and refused to kill any of them on account of this text, maintaining that he had to suffer and could not resist evil'.

Now, I hope none of you would say that that is what this passage teaches! But in Romans chapter 13, if you take time to read it when you go home, you will see that God has invested authority in the law courts. God has invested authority in the state that you live in. He sets up one ruler; He brings down another ruler. In the law of the land it is the responsibility of the judicial system to resist evil. This is important, and we looked at this when we were looking at oaths - that the Lord doesn't say that it's never, on any occasion, right to take an oath. What He is talking about here is individual responsibility. He is not applying it to an unbelieving, unregenerate world. The reason I'm labouring this is that the duties and the functions of the state are quite different from those of the individual. God's purpose in the Sermon on the Mount is to express individual responsibility. Romans 13 - we are not to take out vengeance on another but the state is to do it, and indeed the sword, if you like, the gun of the policeman in society today is ordained by God.

I'll illustrate it for you. It's a ridiculous illustration, but I think it brings home to you the sentiment here - the difference between individual responsibility and the responsibility of the law of the land. If I went home and found that my house was being burgled, and I catch the thief, it may well be my duty individually as a Christian to set him down and give him a glass of milk and a chocolate chip biscuit, but also ring the police for them to come and collect him! Now, I know that's ridiculous, but that is keeping in tandem the two ideas of individual responsibility but also a responsibility to the law of the land. Now, think of it! If you take this verse to its literal extreme, as many believers do, we will not only be resisting evil but we would be letting loose evil in our society. If I go home and find a burglar there I say: 'Look son, that's OK. You've done something wrong but I'm not going to phone the police because the Lord Jesus said, 'Don't resist evil'. So you just go away and rob Sadie down the road, and take all her silver'. Is that what the Lord is teaching? Of course it's not! Let me encourage you, there is some literalistic nonsense that is taught from many portions of scripture that do not weigh up with the whole counsel of God; and we've got to get down to what God teaches.

What is the Lord really teaching? I'll tell you what He's teaching. Four illustrations: the first tells us that as believers we are to choose insults. Choose being insulted over not being insulted. Look at verse 39: 'Whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also'. Now, to the Eastern mind it wasn't the pain of the slap on the cheek that was the problem. It was the absolute insult and indignity that it brought. What's being spoken of here is a slap from the back of your hand, which was ten times more indignant than a slap with the palm of your hand. Now, what happens? If you were slapped across the face all our instincts incline us hotly to return a blow for a blow. What's the Lord saying? If there is a second blow, we as God's people are not to be the ones to throw it. We are to take it!

Now, don't miss the wood for the trees, because week after week as I study these verses, you know what people sometimes do? They get taken up with the actualities of the passage about what it means: 'Now, is it the back of his hand or is it the front of his hand? Or what way did he slap him? With the right hand or the left hand?'. They miss the principle behind what the Lord is saying. Don't miss the principle, because if you do that you do what the Pharisees do! What is the principle? Did the Lord do this? Well, He didn't do it literally. In John 18 and verses 22 to 23 we read this: 'One of the officers which stood by struck Jesus with the palm of his hand...and Jesus answered him, If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil: but if well, why smitest thou me?'. Now, in a literal sense the Lord perhaps didn't jut out His other cheek, but in the most real way He did so.

Does it pay to do this? This is an attitude. It's not a literal action. It doesn't matter if you put your other cheek out and the attitude within you is hate and revenge, and you want to get this person one way or another - we'll follow them and we'll get them somehow, whether with our tongue or with our fist. The Lord is speaking of the attitude deep in our hearts.

Now, does it work? Does it work? There's a famous story that goes around about Billy Bray who was an eccentric Methodist preacher, and he was once an ex-miner. He tells in his biography of his remarkable conversion, and also the disgust of his fellow miners of the fact that he had got saved and given up his evil ways. One day in sheer annoyance one of them struck him in the face saying: 'Take that for turning to Methody!'. Billy turned and looked at him and said: 'May God forgive you man, as I do'. He didn't turn the other cheek, but it was his attitude, isn't that right? And that attitude actually brought that rough individual to Christ!

I'll tell you another story of a keen young soldier determined to nail his colours to the mast right away in his corp. He found himself in a very rough regiment and he was on his knees one evening. They often gave him a hard time, jibing at him as he was on his knees in prayer. One night, as he was kneeling at his bedside, a particularly brutal man threw a boot at his head, and it bounced off his head. That young man continued praying through all the cursing and all the abuse. He didn't do anything. He didn't say anything. Nothing more was done, and night fell and they all went to bed; but when that ruffian got out of his bed that morning, there was a new polished clean pair of boots beside his bed. That man too came to Christ. He was turning the other cheek, wasn't he, the young soldier? Billy Bray - he didn't do it in a literal sense. It's what the Lord is encapsulating in these parables and, indeed, in these illustrations: 'Turn the other cheek' - it's an attitude. Now listen, people mightn't get saved. Whether they get saved or not, it's our duty to do this, but let me say this: much of it has fruit! Much of it has fruit! The bottom line is that we have to choose insults, as the people of God. We may lose our dignity. We may lose our pride, and that wouldn't be a bad thing to lose, but we may gain a soul.

The Lord Jesus was called a glutton, a winebibber, a drunkard. He was called a friend of tax-collectors, and harlots, and sinners. The reason why men called Him this, was that they were accusing Him of the same sins because of who He was hanging around with every day. The early Christians, if you read early church history, were called cannibals because they broke bread, which symbolised the body of Christ, and they drank wine, which symbolised the blood of Christ. They were accused of immorality of the grossest and shameless kind, because they called the Breaking of Bread 'The Love Feast' - and people accused them of having an orgy! When Lord Shaftsbury undertook the cause of the poor and the oppressed he was warned that it would mean that - I quote - 'He would become unpopular with his friends and people of his class, and that he would have to give up all hopes of ever being a cabinet minister'. When Wilberforce began his crusade to free the slaves the slanderous rumour went around that he was a cruel husband, he was a wife-beater, and they even said that he was married to a black woman. But none of those men, especially our Lord Jesus Christ - now please, let the spirit of this teaching infuse your heart - 'When He was reviled He reviled not again. He made Himself of no reputation'. Do you know what that means? He chose to be insulted rather than to be praised. What's the Lord saying with 'turn the other cheek'? Choose the insults!

Secondly, He says 'choose injustice'. Look at verse 40, the second illustration: 'If any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also'. We don't have time to go into all this, but if you were to go Exodus 22 you would find under Jewish law that if you didn't pay your debt your creditor was entitled to take your coat as a guarantee until you did pay the debt. What the Lord is speaking of here is a false accusation. This man was falsely accusing this other man of not paying his debt, and he sues him for his coat. It's an unjust claim. It's this man's right to keep his coat, to have his coat as his own. The law laid down that even if it was a just claim, and he took his coat rightly, he couldn't keep his coat forever. You weren't

allowed to keep another man's coat permanently. What would you do if someone sued you? What would you do if a man falsely accused you? I think in your innermost old man that it would arouse a resentment, a tenacity to cling onto your name, to cling onto your rights, your reputation. What does the Lord say? The Lord says 'No!'. Whether it's an unjust claim, whether you did it or you didn't do it, whether he takes away your cloak permanently, and that's another injustice, you've got to choose injustice! But more than that, the Lord says it's far greater than that: if he takes away your coat, you give him your cloak!

The Lord is saying the Christian is a person that never stands up for his rights. He never disputes about his legal rights. He does not consider himself to have any legal rights at all! Don't water it down! That's what people do with this - they water it down to get their rights. We live in a land that is full of proud, pompous, Protestant rights. The believer doesn't have any. The believer is to fight for rights, but fight for others' rights! Tenaciously, you're to fight for the right of your brother or sister, or the right of those in poverty or in famine, but you are not to make yourself of any reputation. These are hard words, aren't they?

The church, I think, is especial in having people who are caricatured forever standing on their rights, who clutch to their privileges, who will have to be pried loose from them, who will militantly go to the law rather than to suffer what they regard as the slightest infringement upon their rights. Sadly, churches are tragically filled with such people! A Christian - now listen to this - a Christian is a man who has forgotten that he has any rights at all!

You're to choose insults and choose injustice and, thirdly, His illustration tells us, in verse 41, you're to choose inconvenience: 'Whosoever shall compel you to walk a mile, go with him two'. What the Lord is referring to here is in Roman custom - remember the Jews are in the Roman empire at this moment - there was a custom that you could put your hand on someone suddenly and force him to do something for you. If you were a Roman citizen or a Roman leader you could impress someone for imperial business - a sort of press gang. In other words, if there was a Roman official going down the road and you were minding your own business in the corner; if he wanted he could impress you to carry his bags and go wherever he was going. If he so decided, he had the power to compel you for service in accompanying him and aiding him for the next stage of his journey. That's what the Lord means when He says: 'If he compels you to go a mile'. The only other occasion when we have a reference of this is in Matthew 27 and Mark 15 where Simon of Cyrene was compelled to carry the cross of the Lord Jesus. That's the idea here.

What does the Lord say? You'd say: 'Who do you think you are? Who do you think I am? Do you think I'm a second class citizen, asking me to do the like of this?'. The Lord doesn't even say that your attitude is to do it - He says that your attitude is to go an extra mile! Choose inconvenience! How many times are we - and I'm guilty of this - unexpectedly called upon to help or to serve, and it's a great inconvenience to me? How do I do it? It's hard even to get going that one mile, isn't it, let alone get going the extra mile? But do you know something? Our compulsion to do right is more stringent than the imperial Roman government had upon individuals in Judaism to do right, because the Lord Jesus says to us through His word: 'The love of Christ constraineth us. Go not grudgingly or of necessity for God loveth a cheerful giver'. Do you know what the Lord is saying? If you went out today and somebody asked you to do something, whether it was to carry a bag somewhere like the Roman government would, you're to grab the bag and you're to run on ahead of that man, singing and shouting in glory to God: 'For the Lord loveth a cheerful giver'.

It's hard, isn't it? - to choose insults, to choose injustice, to choose inconvenience, and then, fourthly, to choose indulgence. Verse 42, look at it: 'Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away'. Let me say a few things very quickly. This verse is not teaching that you've to give at the expense of your family, because the word of God teaches 'if any widow have children or nephews, let them learn first to show piety at home and to requite their parents, for that is good and acceptable before the Lord; but if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith

and is worse than an infidel'. So you're not to rob Peter inside to pay Paul outside. Supply for your own home! So it's not just giving money 'willy-nilly'.

Secondly, it's not at the expense of your duty. Oliver Goldsmith said he was so liberal to beggars that he had nothing left for his tailor or for his butcher. Not at the expense of others! If you've bills to pay, you pay the bills, no matter how many people are coming to you and asking you for money.

Thirdly, not at the expense of the beggar himself. What I mean is this: a tramp comes up to you in the town and he asks you for a tenner or a fiver, or he asks you for a pound; if you can smell drink off his breath have the sense not to give it to him for he'll go and drink it! Here's a question: why do we always think of money? The Lord doesn't mention money. Give him a feed. Do whatever you like with him, as the Lord leads you but give him something. But don't give to the extent that you harm the person you're giving to. The best form of giving or lending is that which helps people to help themselves. There's provisos to these rules. But the Lord still says, and let's not water it down: 'Give to him that asketh thee'. Here's the real point - when we see somebody, and somebody comes up to us and says: 'I need money', what do we think? 'Does this man deserve it?' Isn't that what we think? What would you have done if the Lord had said when you came to Him and said: 'Lord, would you save me?', and He said: 'Does this man deserve it?'. That's not the question we're to ask, the question we are to ask is this: 'Does this man need it? Does he need it?'. If he needs it give it to him.

'As we therefore have opportunity let us do good unto all', and especially unto them who are of the household of faith. Especially the brethren and the sisters in Christ, we are to do this! As we close today, in the last five minutes, what is the teaching of the Lord? It's to choose insults - yes - it's to choose injustice, it's to choose inconvenience, it's to choose indulgence, but is that all? I mean, if we go out and follow this like the law of the Medes and Persians, and dot all our i's and cross all our t's with this, and when we're slapped across our face we turn the other side of the cheek and follow all His laws - is that what He really wants us to know? Of course it's not! I'll tell you what He is speaking of - He is saying that beyond the Old Testament law there is a higher righteousness that abolishes retaliation altogether. There is an attitude of the 'right cheek' in your heart. Listen to what Matthew Henry says about this: 'If any person says flesh and blood cannot pass by' - in other words, flesh and blood could never ever accomplish what you have in this sermon - 'remember that flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God'.

What do you think when you look at this passage of scripture? Do you know what I think? 'That is impossible!' And do you know what? It is impossible! It is impossible without the divine life of God in your being. You need to know that flesh and blood - effort - cannot get into the Kingdom, let alone keep the laws of the Kingdom. Is it any wonder that the Lord says: 'Marvel not Nicodemus that I say unto you, ye must be born again'? You need the life of God! If you don't have it, my friend, don't follow these things because you're only heaping coals upon your head. You need to be saved!

What is this? How can we sum all this up? How can we sum up the Sermon on the Mount? Do you know what it all is? Listen: it is death to self. Death to self! You take a slap on the cheek, you know what? You're dying; your body's dying to self. You're sued for your coat and you give your cloak. What does that mean? Your property has died to self. You're not materialist. Verse 41 - you're compelled to go the extra mile in your work, in your service, in your energy, in your efforts and strength - you've died to Christ! Now, here's the question the Lord is asking you and I today: will you choose to be a fool for Christ? Will you choose to suffer for Christ? It's a choice! You don't wait until the sovereign will of God brings you into suffering. It's a choice! When you choose insults and injustice and inconvenience and indulgence, the problem is we don't see it as God breaking us down - we see it as everybody else hammering us. We need to come in the spirit of the hymnwriter and say,

'Lord, bend that proud and stiff-necked I,
Help me to bow the head and die;
Beholding Him on Calvary,
Who bowed His head for me'.

Let me finish with this story. It's the choice between common sense and Kingdom sense. I've read recently the life of a martyr who laid down his life for Christ. That's what the Lord is speaking of here: spiritually laying down your life for Christ and others. It's the path of blessing and fulfilment, and you ought not to be afraid to step out by faith on it. His name was Jack Vincent, he was a widower and it happened in October 1931. He was a southern American Presbyterian, and he had been captured by bandits in China. The government forces had surrounded the building, and the bandits that he was captured by offered the missionary freedom if he would implore and persuade the forces of China to retreat and let them all out. Vincent agreed that he would do that on the condition that they would release not only him, but other captives. The bandits refused to do that and they tried to shoot their way out of the camp, and many bandits were killed. All the survivors that were in that camp fled with Vincent, but that old missionary couldn't run because he'd had recent surgery. One bandit shot him. Then another ran up to him and cut off his head. The daughter of a Chinese pastor was among the government troops and she recalled having heard a bandit tell him: 'I'm going to kill you. Are you afraid?'. Vincent replied simply: 'Kill me if you wish. I will go straight to God'.

One of his colleagues, E.H. Hamilton, was inspired to write this poem, and I believe it captures the attitude of what the Lord is teaching. Listen to this - you can be a martyr and not die. It's a martyr's attitude that the Lord is speaking of:

'Afraid of what?
To feel the Spirit's glad release?
To pass from pain to perfect peace?
The strife and strain of life to cease?
Afraid of that?

Afraid of what?
Afraid to see the Saviour's face?
To hear His welcome and to trace
The glory gleam from wounds of grace?
Afraid of that?

Afraid of what?
A flash, a crash, a pierced heart?
Darkness - light of Heaven's art?
A wound of His a counterpart,
Afraid of that?

Afraid of what?
To do by death what life could not?
Baptise with blood a stony plot
'Til souls shall blossom from the spot,
Afraid of that?

'Except a corn of wheat fall in the ground and die, it abideth alone'.

Let's pray and bow our heads. Maybe you didn't know that when you chose to trust Christ that you chose to be insulted, you chose injustice, you chose inconvenience and you chose to be most indulgent. In fact, do you know what you chose? You chose to lose your life that you might find it in Heaven. Are you sure you chose Christ? Choose that narrow road today for it is the road of blessing.

Lord Jesus, help us. Who is sufficient for these things? We know that only the life of Christ satisfies the life of God. We pray that the life of Christ would be manifest in our bodies; that the dying and the living of the Lord Jesus would be seen in us; that men would see our good works and not glorify us, but our Father which is in Heaven. Give us grace, we pray, to be epistles written unto men. Amen.

The Sermon On The Mount - Chapter 11

"Love Your Enemies"

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by Pastor David Legge
Matthew 5:43-48

We're going through a series on the Sermon on the Mount, so I would ask you to turn to Matthew's gospel and chapter 5 - Matthew chapter 5. Let me encourage all the folk who will be out at the meeting tonight to bring as many unconverted folk as you possibly can, I want to be as simple as I can with the presentation of the Gospel tonight on the subject of 'Conversion'. So please do make an effort if you can to bring unconverted folk under the sound of God's Word.

We're looking this morning in Matthew chapter 5 at the last section, remember there have been several sections where the Lord Jesus was dealing with the Old Testament law, and speaking of how He has come to be the fulfilment of it. Those sections began in verse 21, and now we come to the last of those five, and we're looking at the subject of: 'Loving Your Enemies'.

Verse 43, the Lord says: "Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? Do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? Do not even the publicans so? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect".

Let us pray together: Our Father, as we come to Thy eternal Word, we pray now that Thou wilt help us to understand. We pray that You will help us to implement these truths in our lives, they are so difficult - therefore we ask for Thy divine enablement and power and unction of Thy Holy Spirit. To me as I preach the word, that You'll fill me and anoint me to preach it. For those who are listening, that You'll give them that meekness, by Your Spirit, to receive the engrafted word of truth. So help us now we pray, for we ask these things in Jesus' precious name, Amen.

Love your enemies. I'm sure you would admit that the Irish race are not the most forgiving when it comes to their enemies. I read an Irish prayer this week that went like this: 'May those that love us love us, those that don't love us may God turn their hearts, and if He doesn't turn their hearts may He turn their ankles so we'll know them by their limping'. That is often the sentiment of folk from Ulster and indeed Ireland, and in fact any folk that can call themselves sinners - and all are sinners. That is the natural reaction of humanity to those whom we class as our enemies. But nevertheless, still today in our godless and unbiblical generation that hardly knows who Noah is, or Moses is, some even do not know the gospel of Jesus Christ, yet most people know that one of the distinguishing factors of the Christian faith is that the Christian is to love their enemies. It is seen, perhaps, as the primary most distinguishing virtue of the Christian faith.

It is said of Archbishop Cranmer: 'If you would be sure to have Cranmer do you a good turn, you must do him an ill one', for though he loved to do good to all, especially he loved to do good to those who did him evil. He watched for opportunities to do good to those who were doing evil to him on a regular basis. When we look at saints of old like Archbishop Cranmer, and we see this Christian virtue within them, we have to ask ourselves in the light of the words of the Lord today: how do we fare? How do we measure up when it comes to loving our enemies?

Now, we have seen as we have gone through the Lord Jesus commentating on the Old Testament law, the ten commandments, we have seen how in each case He never ever opposed what the law taught. What He did oppose was the unauthorised additions of the Scribes and the Pharisees - in other words, how they inadequately interpreted the word of God, how they took the word of God and twisted it to mean what they wanted in their own interpretation. Indeed, the Lord calls it the tradition of the elders, how they deluded and prefixed - put parts onto - the law, in order to fit their own trends and their own lives.

What the Lord Jesus does is He comes to the law, and He says of Himself: 'I am not come to destroy the law, but to fulfil the law'. So as the Lord has been speaking, and as we have been looking at it in these weeks, as He speaks on the Old Testament Scriptures His primary goal is not destruction, His goal is development. He wants to bring the Old Testament Scriptures to the goal and the development that God intended it in the first place. So He comes to the law of love. I hope you can remember the occasion when the Jewish lawyer came to the Lord Jesus and asked Him what was the greatest of all the commandments, and the Lord replied these words: 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, with all thy mind. This is the first and the great commandment, and the second is like unto it: thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, and on these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets'.

So the Lord Jesus is re-laying the foundation of what the true commandments of the law, and indeed the spirit of the whole of the ten commandments, is. The first five commandments: love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, and with all thy mind; and the last five commandments are related to our brothers and sisters in humanity: and the second is like unto it: love thy neighbour as thyself, and on these two hang all of the law and the prophets.

But again we come to an instance of how men edited the word of God, how men changed the law of God to suit their own circumstances and to suit their own sinful habits and tendencies. So, I want to outline for you two things whereby men edited God's word, and specifically edited the law of God with regards to the law of love. I don't know whether you're computer literate, but you will know on your computer - if you can use your computer - that there is a cutting and pasting mechanism. In other words, if you have a bit of text on your screen you can take out a bit that you don't want, you can put it somewhere else. You can take it out and totally delete it, in fact you can add a bit in from another document - and it's called cutting and pasting, like you would cut the wallpaper and paste it onto the wall. The Pharisees and the Scribes in the Lord Jesus' day had that mentality toward the word of God. They were cutting bits out that they didn't like, they were putting bits in that made it easier for them to follow the law of God.

As we've been looking at the Sermon on the Mount in recent weeks we have seen these Jewish perversions of God's law. The rabbi's teaching with regards to love in verse 43 is said to be this, Jesus says: 'Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy'. Love thy neighbour, they said, and hate thine enemy! Now, the law of God did not say that. It was quite different in Leviticus 19 and verse 18 we read these words: 'Love thy neighbour as thyself', but there it stops. It doesn't say anything about hating your enemy. So the Pharisees, the Jews, had perverted the law of God once more.

They made it different in three ways, first of all in qualification. They didn't just leave it as: 'Love thy neighbour', but they defined for you who your neighbour was. In other words, your neighbour is somebody of the same colour as you, the same religion as you, the same creed as you, he has to be a Jewish neighbour - love your Jewish neighbour, but don't love anybody else. Qualification. Then there was omission, they changed the law of God by omitting some of the truth within it. If you look at verse 43 it says: 'Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy' - what part of the law did they leave out? 'Love thy neighbour as thyself', they omitted it. That's the extent of the law of love, you've to love your neighbour as yourself. They qualified it, they omitted it, and they added to it - there's addition,

because they said: '...and hate thine enemy', and the law of God did not do that. In fact, the law of God - if we had time we could look at it in Exodus 23 - it actually told you how to behave toward your enemy, to behave toward them in benevolence. In other words, if your enemy's ox or ass was stolen or lost and you found it, you had to be kind to him, you had to return to him. The law of God is full of these benevolent instances toward your neighbour and toward your enemy.

I can understand how, perhaps, the Jews had misinterpreted the law of God. If you remember Joshua going into the promised land, Canaan, was told to exterminate all their enemies - men, women, boys and girls were to be totally wiped out so that they could have the land. Perhaps, as they looked at that they thought: 'Well, God wants us to hate our enemies. God wants us to destroy our enemies'. Perhaps as they looked at the Psalms, and if you've read the Psalms you will know that there at times when the Psalmist calls down judgement upon his enemies, calls the wrath of God down upon the enemies of Israel and his personal enemies as the king or a leader in the nation.

What we have to remember in those two instances is this: first of all, God commanded Israel to go into the promised land, God commanded them to clear out the land of all their enemies for one reason: purely because of the evil of those nations. The Canaanites were bringing abominations into the sight of God, the gods that they were worshipping, the evil sinful practice is that they were delving into. If you like this was the holy war that we find in scripture, where God told His people to go in and clear the land so that they would not be contaminated with the sins of the Canaanites. You must remember this: God gave warrant for that. Then as we come to the Psalmist we must also remember that the Psalmist never is talking about his personal enemies, his personal animosity, his personal hate, but he is speaking as a representative of the nation - perhaps as a king, perhaps as a general - or even a representative of God, he's standing in the place of God, singing praises to God in his Psalm or perhaps as a penitential prayer to God for the nation against the enemy.

This is what I want you to note, because we've been looking at this week after week, if we applied this to today and to our nation the nation would be in total chaos. There would be crime everywhere, because we would say: 'Well, you're to love your enemy, you're not to lock them up, you're not to put them in jail, you're not to take them to the court'. If we did it on an international scale we would be saying: 'Well, let Osama Bin Laden get on with it, let them do what they like around the world'. Maybe that seems in our own present situation that that may be what is going on, but these are not principles to be applied to nations, these are not principles to be applied to individual unbelievers, these are the principles of the kingdom of God, these are the principles of believers.

What we are talking about today are your personal enemies, your personal animosities, your personal hatred. You can see how the Jews perverted the word of God for their own ends. You might 'tut, tut', and shake the finger at them, shake your head at them for touching and tampering with the word of God, but it grieves me today to bring to you that Christians do exactly the same. There might be Jewish perversions that edit the word of God and the laws of God, but there are also Christian diversions that take away from the truth of what God has said. We've already said that this verse, perhaps more than anything, in the eyes of people in the world defines the true attitude and nature of the Christian ethic, what the Christian ought to be in the eyes of men and women. But although perhaps it's the pinnacle of all Christian witness and what it should be, you will admit with me as a believer here today that it's the hardest, perhaps, of all the commands that God gives to us in His word, and it's the hardest trait for anybody to find within a Christian believer.

I believe, for that reason, Christian theologies, Christian ideologies, Christian doctrines and beliefs, have been evolved in order to get people out of the awkward corner of forgiving and loving your enemies. Let me give you a few of them: 'Matthew's gospel is for the Jew, so this command is not for me it's for the Jew'. Now, Matthew's gospel is for the Jew, and these were spoken to Jews - but, my friend, this is the word of

God. We haven't time to go into all the details of why we can take this as the scripture to ourselves. Others say: 'Well, it's for the millennial reign of Christ', and it is for the millennial reign of Christ in the sense that it will all be consummated and fulfilled when people actually live like this on the earth, but it still can be applied to the believer and the life of God in our lives today. Whether you say it's only for the Jew, or whether you say it's for the millennial reign of Christ, do you not see what the ploy is behind all of that? 'That's not for me, I'm looking for a way to get around how I can stop having to love my enemy'.

Some commentators that I was reading this week went into the detail of the Greek words for love, and there are four Greek words for love, and they all mean different things. The Greek word for 'love' here isn't family love, it isn't love that you have for a wife or a son or a daughter or a mother or a father, it isn't the love that you have for a friend that you have a great deal of things in common with. It's none of those things, and so some people have said: 'Well, this is a love that isn't an affection of the heart, but it is a love of the mind and the will. When you decide to maybe love a person that you don't really like, you mightn't like them, but God commands you to love them'. I don't know how men and women see this within the word of God, the idea of God putting in a believer a forced love, a love of the will and not a love of the heart. Surely that is the opposite of all the heart teaching within the Sermon on the Mount, that it is not the outward appearance, it is the heart. God is looking for what's in your heart, not that you say or you do something towards someone to show them that you love them, but deep down you can't stand them, you can't be around them.

The word for love here is a different word, it is the word 'agape'. Agape is the greatest love of all, because agape is the love of God, and you can't tell me that God doesn't love us from His heart, that God just loves us with His will and He doesn't really like us. Putting all that aside, even forgetting about all of that - and that proves it for itself - the Lord Jesus said: 'You have heard it said: Love your neighbour as yourself'. That is the extent of this love, it's a great love, I believe it's the greatest love of all, because it's God's love - agape. The love that God has shown toward us! Seneca said this: 'Live for thy neighbour if thou wouldst live for God'. He is right: live for your neighbour if you would live for God!

We have a personal salvation today in evangelicalism, we have a personal redemption, a personal forgiveness, but we have forgotten this: that if you are to live for God, if you are to be a disciple for the Lord Jesus Christ, you're commanded to love your neighbour as yourself, and love them with God's love. It's hard, but, isn't it? Someone said: 'It is no chore for me to love the whole world, my only real problem is my neighbour next door'. That's the truth, isn't it? The problem, perhaps, that we have in a materialistic world is, as someone else said: 'We too often love things and use people, when we should be using things and loving people'.

So, you see how the Jews, how Christian theologians, will do somersaults around the word of God to get out of what it is to be commanded as a believer to love thy neighbour as thyself. Plain as day, isn't it? So, what is it to love your neighbour as yourself? Well, I want to give it to you simply as this: it is admitting God's life. To love your neighbour as yourself is to admit God's life in your personality and in your life. Verse 44 says that: 'Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven'.

Love your enemies! Now, who are your enemies? The Lord defines it in verse 44: them that hate you, those who wish you evil, who detest you, have a real loathing of you, who are often aroused even when you do good things for them, they seem to just emit hate toward you continually. The Lord says: 'Them which despitefully use you', those who threaten you, those who insult you, them which persecute you, those who speak evil against you with their words - or perhaps even further than that, act against you in physical violence. The Lord Jesus says: 'There is a definition of your enemies, you go and love them'. Now, that's not natural, don't tell me that's natural. We live in a world that says: 'You scratch my back, I'll scratch yours. You punch my nose, I'll punch yours'. We live in a world, and the philosophy is: 'Give as good as you get', but the

Lord is coming here and He's saying: 'That's not allowed for the new order, that's not allowed for the kingdom of God, that's not allowed for My children. My children have a greater rule, a higher rule, and it's this: those who are provocative towards you, you have to remain unprovoked. Those who hate you, you must love them. The treatment to everyone who reviles you, persecutes you, say all manner of things against you, despitely use you, your reply always - you don't need to think about it - it's just love'.

Now, can you imagine the reaction of the disciples when the Lord Jesus is teaching this? Can you imagine their faces? Perhaps even the listeners around in the outer crowd as they heard this absolutely, as far as they were concerned, impossible teaching. Perhaps, I imagine - and it's only my imagination - the Lord was even jeered as He said these words! 'Love them? How can you love your enemy!'. Maybe that's what is coming from your heart as you listen to the word of God today. You're saying from your heart: 'How is that possible?'.

Well, there is natural love - and you don't have to work at that. That's the love that you have for the members of your family, for the family circle, and that love is probably drawn from your heart because you're flesh and blood. If you're not flesh and blood, it's a love that is drawn out because of an affinity of interests, or because you're similar in character to this other person or in temperament. It's not hard to love someone that you're attracted to in that way, it's a natural affection. There's a Greek word for that, but that's not the word here, the word here is God's love - and that means a supernatural love, a love that supersedes all other loves. It is a love that is utterly regardless of condition or of position. It's a love that loves you and is a genuine love from the heart and from the will, but it loves you not because of anything in you, but just because it loves you.

A tremendous illustration of this is found in Luke's gospel chapter 10, we don't have time to look at it all. The good Samaritan - and I don't need to refresh you with the story of the good Samaritan, I'm sure most of you, if not all of you, know it - but that good Samaritan, what happened? His heart went out in love, and went out practically for that man lying in blood. The love that he had toward him was an unknown love, in other words the Samaritan had never seen this man in his life before - so it wasn't a natural affinity, it wasn't a bond of flesh, it was a love that went out to something that was unattractive. Can you imagine the ugly sight of that man lying bruised and bleeding, a battered form? Yet this love went towards something that was unattractive. It was an unprofitable love, the Samaritan was getting nothing out of it - in fact, if anything, he was losing. It was costing him, for he had to put the man up in the inn, remember. He had to pay for all his hospitality and all his care. It was an unfriendly love, the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans - and for that Samaritan to do what he did toward the Jew was going across political, social, religious and cultural barriers, just to do that. Now, that's the love that is talked about when God says to you and to me: 'Love thy neighbour as thyself'.

Imagine that! A person you don't know, a person that's unattractive, you get nothing out of it, it's unprofitable. Maybe the person is unfriendly, but you do it! That snotty-nosed little boy in Sunday School who's never invited to tea, who's never made a fuss over, who's never been taken to the zoo, and who smells of urine - it's to love him, that's that love. Do you know what it is? It's God's love, God's love! When we were yet without strength, Christ died for the ungodly. While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. When we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son. Even when His perfect justice had to punish, His perfect love remained. What we're talking about here is the love of Jesus. We are to love others with the love of Christ!

'A perfect friend is one who knows the worst about you, and loves you just the same.
There's only one who loves like that, and Jesus is His name,
His wonderful, wonderful name'.

Let's, in the closing moments, pin this love down. Verse 45a says you're to love like this that you may be the children of your Father which is in heaven. Now really what that is saying is: is there a family likeness? Ask yourself that today: is there a family likeness? Am I like God? Am I loving with God's love? Am I resembling Him in the love that I offer others? Just as your father, your mother, your daughter, your son has a family resemblance to you, God is saying: 'This is the resemblance in my children, because they love like I love'. It's a spiritual resemblance. Augustine said: 'Good for good, evil for evil, that is natural. Evil for good, that is devilish. Good for evil, that is divine' - that's divine. It is the characteristic of God in your life, it's the family characteristic and resemblance. It's what John meant when he says: 'We love Him' - now that doesn't literally mean we love Him, as in 'we love God because He first loved us', that's a mistranslation. It means this: 'We love others, because He loved us'. In other words: 'Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another'. Do you see it? The love of God in our lives is to cause us to ferment within our souls to such an extent of appreciation that we go out to a world and we love them as Christ loved.

The big question is: can this be done? Well, don't answer that question with whether it is being done or not, for frankly it's not being done. The question is: can it be done? The answer is: yes! But there's only one type of man and woman who can do it. There are three men in the scriptures: one is called the natural man; one is called the carnal man; and one is called the spiritual man. If you're to love like God loves, you are to be the spiritual man. The natural man is the unregenerate, the unsaved, the unconverted, and it's foolish to tell him to love his enemies for he receives not the things of the Spirit of God, they're foolishness unto him. They're unsaved, there's no point in telling unsaved people to love their enemies. The second is the carnal man, and that is a person who is a Christian, but he's like a baby who's underdeveloped. He has never grown up, and there's no use telling him to love his enemies, because he won't do it - he doesn't want to do it. If even in your prayers you include forgiveness for your enemies, maybe on the outside he says: 'Yes', but inwardly he's recoiling at the fact that you should ever say such a thing.

My friend, if you're unsaved, if you're a carnal Christian, you cannot love your enemies. What you must be is the spiritual man, that is a man who is a Christian and who lives as a Christian, who lives on the high level of the spiritual plain which is the normal Christian life. God's word says: 'If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His'. We all have the Spirit, we all have the Spirit if we are saved, that's not the question regarding the spiritual man - the question is this: how much of you does the Spirit have? If He has all of you, you are the spiritual man.

How is the family likeness today? Love like that detects your parentage, and in verse 45 it says love like that displays God's impartiality. God let's the rain drop on the righteous and the unrighteous, He lets the sun shine on the righteous and the unrighteous - that's the type of love we are to have. The love of God, that type of love makes a man like God! It displays God's impartiality, and thirdly, verse 46 and 47, it demonstrates a good testimony. The Lord says: 'So what if you love your brother, so what if you love your neighbour, so what if you love someone you're attracted to - even the publicans do that!'. The publicans were the lowest of the low in Jewish society - the Lord Jesus says: 'You're doing as much as the worst sinner imaginable!'. That's not what we're called to do, what does He say? You're called to do more than others - more than others!

Now, how do we measure up to that? How many people have been turned off Christianity, who haven't got saved or are not getting saved at this moment, because of something that a believer has done because they have not lived 'more than others'? Oh, we are often criticised - and sometimes we resent the criticism of unbelievers - but here's the big question: is it true? Is it true? You know, it's amazing to me, in all of this Sermon we're astounded at what God is asking us through the Lord Jesus to do, but the sad thing is this: how far short do we fall of it all?

Verse 48 says this love derives from Christian maturity. He says: 'Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect'. Now that's not perfect in wisdom, perfect in power, perfect in holiness -

it's in the context of this: perfect in love. You're to be perfect in love, as God is perfect in love. It doesn't mean sinlessness, perfect morally or spiritually. What it means is two perfections I believe: perfect in capacity. If I had a glass of water here, and I was standing beside Lough Neagh, that glass of water is filled to capacity just as Lough Neagh is. They're not filled with the same amount of water, and you cannot be filled with the same amount of love as God is filled with at this moment - but you can be filled to capacity. Do you get it? All your being filled in fullness.

Is the love of God shed abroad in your heart by the Holy Ghost? Are you filled with the Spirit? And if you are filled with the Spirit you will be filled with the fruit of the Spirit, and one of the fruits of the Spirit is love. It's perfection of capacity, but secondly it's perfection of maturity. The word 'perfection' here is 'telios' (sp?) - and do you know what it is? If you had a half-grown lad here, and a tall lad fully-grown - the tall lad is telios, fully developed, fully mature. If you had a student who's just learning, and a professor who's an expert - telios is the Professor. In other words, God is saying: 'I want you to have a grasp of love. I want you to have a perfection in the function that I have given to you'. It's the idea of the screw and the screwdriver. When the screwdriver fits the screw, that is telios. In other words, when it's filling the function it was created for. What were you and I created for? God said: 'Let us make man in our image and after our likeness' - we were created to be like God! Perfect!

Oh, it's impossible, isn't it? It's impossible unless you have died. It's no good doing. It's no good getting the Sermon on the Mount open and sitting and saying: 'I must, I must, I must try and do this. I have to do my best, I have to live like that' - that's not what God is asking you to do. God is asking you to die. He's not looking for good doing, He's looking for Godlikeness. He doesn't want you to exhibit good human characteristics, but divine characteristics. The miracle of it all is this: there is not one person in this building this morning who can't do it, for God does it!

Our Father, we pray this morning that our lives will exhibit the divine nature: God is love. We pray that we would love one another, love our neighbours as ourselves, but love our enemies and love all - for we believe God loves all. We pray, our Father, that Thou wilt make us perfect as Thou art perfect. For Christ's sake, Amen.

The Sermon On The Mount - Chapter 12

"Why Are You Working?"

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Matthew 6:1-4

Matthew chapter 6, we have finished now chapter 5 - the first chapter in the Sermon on the Mount - now we're entering into this next chapter. The rest of this great sermon of the Lord Jesus is given over to true righteousness. You know that the theme of the sermon has been this true righteousness - not externalities of ritualistic, Pharisaic religion, but true righteousness, which is the righteousness from our hearts. We've been looking at that in the first few verses of chapter 5 of the sermon, but now He takes us a little bit further and He talks to us about righteousness in our relationships with one another. We've been instructed in chapter 5 to avoid, negatively, heart unrighteousness - you remember that. We were told, not just not to hate, but not to hate in our hearts. OK, you're not to speak hateful words, murderous words; you're not to kill. But the Lord goes further and says: 'You're not to hate in your heart'. Concerning adultery He warns us about heart unrighteousness where that's concerned. It's not just the sin of adultery that the Lord prohibits, but it's actually heart unrighteousness, heart adultery - if you look at a woman with your eyes and lust after her, you've committed adultery already in your heart.

So He has told us in chapter 5 to avoid, negatively, heart unrighteousness. But now in chapter 6 He's telling us to do the positive, to engage positively in heart righteousness. Chapter 5: 'Don't get involved in heart unrighteousness', chapter 6: 'I want you now positively to engage in heart righteousness'. In verses 1 to 18 He speaks of it concerning God and the worship of God, how we relate righteously to God. In verses 19 to 34 you have a relationship, righteously, to material things. In chapter 7 verses 1 to 20 you have a relationship in righteousness to other people. Our devotion to God is described in this chapter, through alms, through prayer and through fasting. Prayer is a relationship of the soul, our soul's relationship in righteousness to God. Fasting is our bodily relationship of righteousness to God. Alms is our relationship of righteousness to other people, and our relationship to our possessions that we own. To the Jewish mind, those three things that we will encounter in chapter 6 - almsgiving, prayer, and fasting - were the three pillars to a righteous life. Because of that, the Lord addresses it, and the irony that He says about these three things - charity giving, praying, and fasting - is that these three righteous acts lend themselves ably to hypocrisy and to unrighteousness.

So let us read these verses together; verses 1 to 4 just this morning: "Take heed", the Lord says, "that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven. Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly".

The title of our message today is: 'Why Are You Working?'. Why are you working? What are you doing for God? I mean, what are you doing within the Iron Hall? What are you doing outside the Iron Hall that could be said to be a service for the Lord Jesus Christ, and even a service for others for the Lord Jesus Christ? I think there are possibly three groups of people who would answer to that question. There are some who are doing nothing. There are some here, sadly there are some in membership within the Iron Hall, that are doing nothing for the Lord. There are some who are doing little. The opposite extreme of doing nothing is there are some who are doing absolutely everything. The answer often comes back: 'No one bothers with me! Why

should I help out? Why should I put my shoulder to the plough? Nobody comes to me, nobody talks to me, no-one visits me'. Have you ever asked the question why no one helps you, why no one visits you, why no one encourages you? I think the answer can be given in the poem:

'Somehow, not only for Christmas, but all the year through
The joy that you give to others is the joy that comes back to you.
And the more you spend in blessing the poor and the lonely and sad,
The more of your heart's possessions return to make you glad'.

What are you doing for the Lord? We need that question asked to us. What are we doing for others? Evangelistically, we need to make sure we're not underestimating the impact of what it is to do things for other people in this district around us to show them the love of Christ.

In 'Newsweek', an American magazine, there was once a cartoon that had a starving man standing in front of an empty bowl, and a man with a big cigar hanging out of his mouth came along to the bowl and poured out a great sack of words to fill that bowl. The caption at the bottom said: 'We need more than just talk. We need to take action'. We can preach and we can teach. We can sing our hymns and we can say all the verses, but at the end of the day what this world around us, what our brothers and sisters in Christ need to see is not words but action!

These verses are mighty, because the Lord Jesus presupposes a few things. First of all, He presupposes that we are doing alms. Look at verse 1: 'Take heed that ye do not your alms'. He doesn't even tell us to do them, He is assuming that we're doing them already. 'You should be doing them', the Lord says, 'already!'. Before you get a complex as you sit in the Iron Hall today - you're maybe saying: 'Well, I'm not the only one. Don't be looking at me. You're thinking of me? Well, I'm not the only one. What about so-and-so? They don't do anything'. Then the theologians get up on their high horse, and they open the word of God and they say: 'Well, we want to avoid a social gospel'. We're afraid to get like the establishment and provide for the poor, provide for the homeless and helpless - and so they get the loophole out of the verses by doing nothing, theologically.

Listen to Matthew Henry, and I am sure there is no one that would find fault with this man in his holiness and devotion to the Lord, and even in much of his theology. He said in his day, as a Puritan: 'If superstitious Papists have placed a merit in works of charity, that will not be an excuse for covetous Protestants that are barren in such good works' - now, listen to this - 'It is true: our alms deeds do not deserve heaven, but it is as true that we cannot go to heaven without them'.

What did the Lord say? What is the basic sentiment of this message that we look at today? This is it: you may say: 'Well, so-and-so's not doing it. I haven't had it done unto me. The evangelical church at large isn't doing it, and we wouldn't like to stand out and be different'. What does Christ say? 'Be ye therefore not like unto them. They are carnal but be you Christlike' - that's our standard!

We could spend a whole series of meetings on that one thing, but that's not even what the Lord's saying. I'm saying something that He's not saying. He's saying: 'I'm taking it for granted that you are already doing those things'. The real issue of what the Lord is saying is that you could be doing absolutely everything for the Lord, but why are you doing it? Why are you doing what you do? The Lord says works are to be expected, but what is the motivation? That's the real question! What is your motivation for what you do? 'Why does motivation matter?', you might say, 'Surely is it not good enough that you're doing something? Is it not good enough that you're involved?'. Listen - it's not good enough!

Oh boy, we're trying to get people involved, and I don't want to try to discourage anybody getting involved. We have great needs in this fellowship that must be met, but one of the common misconceptions of

Christians, and indeed non-Christians, is this: all good will be rewarded. 'All good will be rewarded'. The unconverted believes that, and that's what takes them to hell! They think by living a moral and a charitable life that they will go to heaven, but all good will not be rewarded. The believer believes that: 'As long as I do something; it doesn't really matter about the motive, as long as I'm doing something' - that will take you to the Judgement Seat empty handed!

The word of God teaches us that not all good done by Christians will be rewarded. Paul said: 'Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire'. Here's our question: what is the difference between good that is rewarded and good that is not rewarded? What is the difference between Christian work that will receive reward from God, and that which will be burnt up and receive nothing? Here is the keyword, here is the difference: motivation!

At the end of a concert on one occasion there were two ushers applauding harder than anybody in the whole of the crowd. The people who were music-lovers smiled up to see two music-lovers who appreciated all of the notes that were played. They were all in the right order, until one of the ushers stopped and the other said to him: 'Keep clapping you dope, for if we get another encore we get overtime!'. What is their motivation? It was not the love of music, it was their overtime. They were doing what was right in the eyes of all the crowd around them, but what was the reason that they were doing it? Why do you do what you do for Christ? The big question the Lord asks us is, do you do it for men or do you do it for God? Do you do it to be seen of men or to be seen of God? Do you do it to be rewarded of men or rewarded of God? The tragedy that many fall over is that you can do the right thing for the wrong reasons, and the question that we have to grapple with today is: how can you make sure that your fruit will remain unto the Lord Jesus? Do you want to know that?

Well, the Lord tells us. He says to us in verses 1 to 4 - listen - if you do good works for people your reward will be from people. Have you got it? If you do good works for people your reward will be from people. If you like, it is like for like, what you put in you get out. If you're doing something for a person you will get your reward from that person. The Lord tells us to do it in secret, not to glorify our giving or what we do. Many people ask the question: 'Is this not contradicting Matthew 5 verse 16, where the Lord says, 'Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven?'. On the one hand the Lord is saying: 'You do good works so that others can see My glory', yet in this passage He's saying, 'You cover up your good works. Don't blow the trumpet about it'.

The Lord is speaking about two different sins. In Matthew 5 He's talking about cowardice. He's speaking against the fact that you're afraid to go out and declare your faith, and do good works. But the sin that He's talking about here is overdoing it in insincerity and hypocrisy, and trying to show yourself to be something that you're not. Two different sins! One writer said the difference is this: 'Show when you are tempted to hide, and hide when you are tempted to show'.

It is again the hidden thought of the heart that the Lord is concerned with - motivation. What does He say? He says - the first thing in verses 1 and 2: 'Are you doing it to be seen of men?'. These alms (and 'alms' simply means works of mercy, pity, righteousness), do you sound a trumpet when you do something good? That's probably a proverbial statement in the day, a bit like we use the statement 'sounding your own trumpet'. Do you bring attention to what you're doing for God? The picture that the Lord is conjuring up in the Jewish mind is of the pompous Pharisee on his way down to the temple or the synagogue to put money in the special box for the poor, or to give a gift to the poor. As he walks down there's a whole parade, and in front of him there are trumpeters blowing a fanfare as they walk, and it's quickly attracting a crowd. People hear the noise and they all run out to see what's going on. It's reported in the history books of one Rabbi, that

he carried an alms bag on his back so that the poor might help themselves. C.H. Spurgeon said rightly, encapsulating the spirit of what our Lord is saying: 'To stand with a penny in one hand and a trumpet in the other is the posture of hypocrisy'.

Hypocrites! If you draw attention to what you do for God, you are a hypocrite. This word 'hypocrite' is fascinating. Literally, in the Greek language, it means an actor who uses a mask. In other words, someone who is covering up who they really are. This happens in religious life, it happens in this fellowship. There are people who use religion to cover up their own sins, and indeed to get profit as the Pharisees did. It's anyone whose world is a stage, who are acting out a role, but it's a false role; who are impersonating something or someone that they're not. They are trying to get others to believe that they are, but deep down their heart is impure.

One other translation put this verse like this: 'Be careful not to show off your religion before men'. Because people who tend to cover over their sinfulness with religiosity are usually people who are arrogant show-offs with little deep sincere spirituality in their heart. If you want to know a hypocrite, insincerity will be the stench that will come from them. There will be an aroma of falsehood that will hit you, and it comes across every time, for the Pharisee's religion was insincere, it was dishonest. They practised their religion to be praised of men, but true righteousness was not within. Now, you can't tar all hypocrites with the one brush. There are several types of hypocrites. One type is an evil man who is trying to portray goodness, like those who tried to trip up the Lord Jesus, who tried to test Him and, in His words, tried to bring accusation against Him. They were evil. They knew what they were doing. They were being deceptive, but not all hypocrites are like that. There's another type who is puffed up with his own importance and self-righteousness. In fact, he's blind to his own faults. He may be genuinely unaware that he's being hypocritical, but even though he's harsh to other people, even though he's unloving and does not portray the fruit of the Spirit, he's still a hypocrite and he doesn't know it. The irony about hypocrisy is no matter what type you are, everybody notices it.

But the hypocrisy here in verse 2 is different than those two, because this man actually talks himself into believing that, at heart, deep down in his heart, he is conducting himself in the best interests of those people that are poor and deprived in the society. He truly believes, deep in his heart, that he is doing good. The fact is this: he is doing good for the betterment of other people, but the thing that makes him a hypocrite is his motivation for doing it - it is still self! He is genuinely, from his heart, doing it for the good of other people, but he is doing it to be praised of those people. He is doing good works for people, and he is getting his reward from people.

Why does he do it? To be seen of men. Secondly, verse 2, the Lord says: 'To be praised of men'. He receives the reward that he wants, he gets what he asks for. He's seeking the praise of men - he gets it. They're not living, these men, for the applause of eternity, they're living for the applause now - here on earth. The Lord testifies to that when He said: 'These men' - Pharisees - 'receive honour one of another and seek not the honour that cometh from God only'. John the Baptist said they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God. The spirit of their giving is found in this poem:

I did a favour yesterday,
A kindly little deed,
And then I called to all the world
To stop and look and heed!

They stopped and looked and flattered me
In words I could not trust,
And when the world had gone away
My good deed turned to dust'.

Their account is closed. That's what the Lord is saying. Their payment is given down here. There's nothing that goes forward to heaven for their reward. They get the receipt in full for all that they have done down here, not from God but from themselves and from those around them. You see the picture - a performance, and at the end of the performance everybody claps and applauds. That's the reward, and they get it. There's many different motivations for giving, even in wrong ways. There's a sense of duty, isn't there? 'I have to do this. I'm a Christian. I have to give'.

I read a story this week about a man in Glasgow who used to bail out drunks on a Saturday evening, in order that they could get out and make sure that they got to their job on Monday morning and wouldn't lose it. But that same guy that went around bailing them out for half a crown insisted that the first wage packet they got back, that his half crown was given back to him. It's duty, but really he hasn't given himself. That's a motivation that is impure, a sense of duty. Then there is prestige - what is being talked of here - to glory in the praise and thanks that you get. But there's one more motivation and this is the pure one that we want to dwell on today - listen: those who have to do it! Not a sense of duty, not in order to get prestige, but there is a group of people called Christians - apparently! - and they can't help being Christlike. They've a Christlike heart, and they can do nothing else. They can't help giving in love!

If you do good works for people your reward will be from people. But the second thing the Lord says, in verses 3 and 4, is this: 'If you do good works for God, your reward will be from God'. Verse 3 tells us to do your works, not to be seen of men, but to be seen of God: 'When you do your alms, let not your left hand know what your right hand does'. Here's the big question, OK? This happens every week I preach on the Sermon on the Mount. Everybody misses the point - well, not everybody, but a lot of people miss the point - and get taken up: 'Now, what does that mean? Does that mean I can join the covenant scheme, or is that letting my left hand know what my right hand is doing? Does that mean I can't put the thing in the box at the back, because somebody sees me doing it? Is that what that means?'. You're doing what the Pharisees do, by the way. You're missing the point of the message and getting taken up with the little idiosyncrasies around it. Must your giving be anonymous? Well, I think what the Lord is saying is: 'Make your giving anonymous as far as you can'. But, you know, in the early church, the church knew that Barnabas had given his income for the sale of land, in Acts chapter 4. The church knew all about it. The church was encouraged to take their giving and lay it at the apostle's feet. It was not done in secret, but the difference was the motive and the manner in which it was done. You can see the antithesis of that in Ananias and Sapphira. They did the same thing, but it wasn't the act that was wrong; it was the motivation from within. The Lord is saying, if you want to guard your pure motive you've got to, as far as possible, do your giving in secret. It doesn't mean if you can't do it in secret you don't do it at all. Sure that's nonsense!

The Lord is talking about the individual, as He has been talking right throughout this sermon. You're not to blow a trumpet. You're to give in secret as far as possible. But my friends, you need to watch, because the irony of this passage is this: if you give in secret (and we're all encouraged in these verses to do it), you can actually, by preserving your anonymity (nobody knows you're giving), you can take pride in that yourself! You can quietly give and nobody knows about it. You maybe didn't put a name on the envelope or anything, but you put it through the door and as you went away you gave yourself a spiritual pat on the back - 'Well done, you're great! You didn't even tell anybody. The wife doesn't even know that you did that'. Whose hands are not to let one another know? It's your left hand and your right hand. It's not somebody else's left hand or somebody else's right hand. It's your left hand knowing what your right hand is doing. The Lord is using an illustration to say you're to even go as far as keeping this secret from yourself!

What does that mean? Does that mean you close your eyes the next time you write a cheque? I'd love to do that every time I write a cheque! Is that what it means? No. You're to close your eyes in your heart. In other words, we can take pride even in ourselves when we're doing a thing secretly. But what this verse is meaning

is not so much what your hand is doing as it passes over the blank cheque note, but rather what your heart is thinking while the hand is moving. That's what matters!

We are not to be self-conscious in our giving. We are to keep it secret from ourselves. It is possible to turn an act of mercy into an act of vanity. Do you know what this really is? This is what you can miss if you taken up with the wee things here. Do you know what this sermon, all of it is? Dietrich Bonhoeffer said: 'It is the death knell to the old man'. The death knell to the old man: self-centredness, self-consciousness, self-praise, the great characteristics of our old nature - it is a death to it. You cannot literally obey this, but what the Lord is saying is, as far as you can, give in secret, but when you give in secret you've got to forget about it yourself. Don't summon it to your mind and gloat over it. The Lord is saying - this is remarkable - do good until it is an unconscious habit of life, you do it and you don't know that you're doing it. That's what He's saying!

When you do it, oh my friend, what do we do? If the Lord rewarded us as we were giving - not reward of men and applause, that's not what we're talking about, but if the Lord gave us a crown when we gave some money to somebody, or we gave some help, we would say: 'Oh You noticed, didn't You? Oh You felt about it the same way as I did. It was good, wasn't it?'. This is hard, what did the Lord say? He said that the spirit that will be in His disciples, who literally give and don't realise they're doing it because of a heart that is so like Christ - when they are rewarded they don't say: 'Oh Lord, you noticed!' They said, 'Lord, when saw we thee an hungered and fed thee?'. They didn't even know they were doing it. He replied: 'And as much as ye have done it unto the least of my brethren, ye have done it unto me'. Listen to what Oswald Chambers says about this: 'Get into the habit of having such a relationship to God that you do good without knowing you do it. Then you will no longer trust your own impulse or your own judgement, but you will trust only the inspiration of the Holy Spirit of God, and the mainstream of your motives will be the Father's heart, not your own; the Father's understanding, not your own. When once you are rightly related to God like this He will use you as a channel through which His disposition will flow'.

To be seen of God, secondly and finally, verse 4, to be praised of God. Have you ever sung this hymn?

'Riches I heed not,
Nor man's empty praise
Thou mine inheritance
Now and always.
Thou and thou only,
First in my heart,
High King of Heaven:
My treasure Thou art'.

The Lord said to Abraham: 'After these things the word of the Lord came to him in a vision, 'Fear not Abram. I am thy shield and thy exceeding great reward'. Paul said: 'But as we are allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men but God who trieth our hearts'! Is He the reason?

In the Revised Version, in Darby's translation, the word 'openly' is omitted. God says, 'If you do this in secret I will reward you', and when it says 'openly' it may not be there, but the point is this: when God rewards us, if He does on earth, men won't see it to praise us; and when God rewards us in heaven it will not be so that we can strut about Glory like a peacock with all our crowns around our brow, but it will be for the glory of Christ!

Who are we doing it to? Are your eyes on God or are your eyes on men? What are you motivated for? What rewards? Let me finish with this. There was once a fable told about a dog, and the dog boasted his ability as

a runner. One day his friend said: 'If you're such a good runner, you chase after that rabbit there'. The dog - away he went and chased after the rabbit, and he failed. The other dog stood and laughed at him, and ridiculed him because of all the boasting he did. But this was his reply: 'You must remember that the rabbit was running for his life, while I was only running for my dinner'. Are you working for your life in heaven, or are you working for your dinner down here? What's our example? I'll tell you what it is: we don't do good works because people deserve it. We don't do it because they need it. We do it because it is unto God, and our example is this: we know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor that we, through His poverty, might be made rich.

Let's bow our heads. Can I ask you please, are you working for the Lord? If you are, are you working for people and your only reward is being praised of them, or are you working for God? You may not get a 'Well done' down here. You may not get a pat on the back, but you'll get your reward in heaven.

Father, this is so hard. This sermon is devastating to me, and I suspect to the most of us that are willing to let it penetrate our hearts. I seek my own glory, for I am a sinner. Lord, what it takes is that we die to self. We pray, we thank Thee, that at Calvary the old man was put to death, but we pray that You will help us day by day to reckon him dead, to reckon all that self-seeking and pride and self-gratification; that we will be absolutely oblivious to even the good that we are doing, that the life of God will shine and manifest itself so radiantly from us that we're not even aware of it, that men will see it and not glorify us but glorify our Father which is in heaven. In His Son's Name we pray, Amen.

The Sermon On The Mount - Chapter 13

"Why Are You Praying?"

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by Pastor David Legge
Matthew 6:5-8

Now we're turning again our Bibles to the Sermon on the Mount. We have studied in weeks gone by chapter 5, which is the first chapter of the Lord's sermon, and now we have entered into chapter 6 of Matthew's gospel. Last Lord's Day we looked at the subject 'Why Are You Working For The Lord?' - why do you do you alms for God? We looked at the motivation of why we do things for the Lord, in verses 1 to 4. This week we're going to look at verses 5 through to 8, and the question for this week that the Lord asks is: 'Why Are You Praying?'.

So we'll read from verse 5, the Lord addresses His own disciples again: "When thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly. But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him".

Let us just bow and pray before we hear the word of God together: Father, we thank Thee for the gift of prayer, the gift of corporate prayer that we enjoy at this very moment as we lift our spirits to Thee. We thank Thee for private prayer, and for the privilege of having a closet where we can shut the door from all the world and all the hustle and bustle that would distract us from eternal things, and we can commune with Thee through Jesus the Son. We pray now, our Father, that You would guide us to understand a little bit more what our responsibilities are as Thy children. We pray that Thou wilt give us grace, that after we hear the word of God that we will be enabled by Thy strength and by Thy Spirit to obey the word of God and to live lives that are godly in Christ Jesus. We pray, our Father, now for the enduement of power from on high upon this preacher and upon this gathering, for we need Thee now - for the sake and for the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ we ask, Amen.

The prayer meeting of the church has been described by various people down through the epochs of its history as the powerhouse of the church. I'm sure you've heard it referred to as that. It has also been referred to as the thermometer of the church, in other words you can gauge how hot or cold the church is in spiritual zeal by the state and the health of the prayer meeting in the local assembly. I read a book on one occasion, and the author defined the prayer meeting and its importance - and indeed the dwindling responsibility of the saints towards the prayer meeting in this day and age - by this little quip, he said: 'Look at Sunday morning, and you will see how popular the church is. Look at Sunday evening, and you will see how popular the Pastor is' - in other words, the people have come back to listen to him - 'But look at the prayer meeting, and you will see how popular God is'.

I know that the prayer meeting is the thermometer of the church, it is the powerhouse, and we don't have prayer we don't have power. But I think that the prayer meeting does not just reflect upon the corporate body of the church of Jesus Christ, but it can also reflect upon the individual. It can be your thermometer! Indeed, it is your powerhouse, and if you are absent from the prayer meeting of God's people it says a great deal about your spiritual health. If I was to ask you: 'What is the condition of your prayer life today?', I wonder

what your answer would be? Is your prayer life ready for admittance into Accident and Emergency, or has it got to such a stage that it should just bypass the hospital and go straight to the cemetery? How do we gauge it, how do we know the condition of our prayer life?

Well, I think that a good reflection of it may be how many of you come to the prayer meeting regularly. How many of you come? How many of you promising young people are here on a Thursday evening for prayer? Many of you are promising with gift and enthusiasm, and we rejoice that we have such a good group of young people, but where are you when God's people pray? You are the future core of this church and the church at large, but perhaps you're too busy, perhaps you're doing other things, or are you just plain disinterested to be here? The young people often get a hard time of it, so I direct my attention for a few moments to the older folk within the assembly. Do you set an example to the young people by coming to the place of prayer? What example are you setting? Parents, do you convey to your children that it's acceptable and legitimate for a committed Christian to sit in on Thursday evening and watch Coronation Street, while the people of God are agonising and wrestling with principalities and powers in the place of prayer?

Of course, like last week, we saw that there are people who do nothing in the church, there are people who do a little, and of course there are people inevitably who seem to be doing absolutely everything! You can make the same reflection and observation with regards to the prayer life of the church. There are brethren who don't pray, don't pray at all. There are folk who won't pray, unless they're asked to pray - and there are some who are always praying. I feel that that reflects the sentiment and the spirit of what the Lord Jesus is saying in this passage that we are looking at today, for there are two extremes. There is the extreme of the person who never ever is heard to pray in the prayer meeting, or never prays at home - and that is no desire for prayer, an absolute lack of desire totally. Then there are others who you can't stop getting praying, because they have an all-consuming desire - not to pray, but a desire to be seen to pray.

It's remarkable, isn't it? We will see in the weeks that lie ahead how these three of the most holiest occupations for the saints - alms giving, praying and fasting - can be so abused. Indeed, they can be used as a platform for hypocrisy and for religious sin. I don't want you to miss this, before we go on any further, because the Lord again is contrasting these two different approaches to these holy things. He contrasts spiritual public life with your spiritual private life. What you do in public when other Christians are watching, when other people are observing; and what your life really is when the door is closed, and no-one knows perhaps what life you and your family are living. He is contrasting the external with the internal, what people see on the outward appearance and what God sees deep into your heart that could be an entirely different thing altogether. He is contrasting the carnal, in other words the fleshly, and the spiritual - that which is of the heart with that which is of the flesh, that which is of man with that which is from Christ and the Spirit of God in your life.

I think these two contrasts between spiritual and fleshly, public and private, external and internal, they can be reflected in the whole of Christendom - so-called - today. You have two poles apart. You have liberal emotionalism which is all heart and no head, people who don't think about their following God but they just feel something - they have 'emotions'. Then there is the other extreme that we have to guard against, and that is dead conservatism which is all head and no heart. It's amazing to me - well, it's not really, but I think it should hit us today - that the Lord, again, as He did with alms giving, He doesn't command His people to give alms, He doesn't command in these verses His people to pray - it's expected of them! He didn't start His sermon the way I have started, with seeing that there are believers who don't have a need to come to the prayer meeting. The Lord Jesus assumes that if you're walking in fellowship with Him, if you are trying to follow Him, you will want to pray and you'll want to be with God's people who are in prayer.

Matthew Henry put it well when he said: 'You may as soon find a living man that does not breathe, as a living Christian that does not pray'. The issue today, as it was not last week, is not 'if you pray' or 'if you give

alms' or 'if you fast', but the question is: 'You're doing it' - or at least you ought to be doing it - 'Why are you doing it? How are you doing it?'. The Lord again is addressing our motivation for prayer. He says: 'Do not strive after being seen to pray publicly, to be praised of men, but pray privately to be seen and to be rewarded of God'. The Lord again is speaking of heart relationship. Heart relations, He is saying, is more important than public relations. The question I pose to you today, and the question that the Lord Jesus Christ brings to us all by His Spirit through His word, is simply this: is your public prayer life a cover-up for your private prayer life?

When I speak of public prayer life it can be the brethren in the assembly who participate audibly, it can be the sisters who sit and do not participate audibly but pray from their hearts, it could even be your attendance - the fact that you come to the prayer meeting, if you come at all. Why do you do it? The Lord is guarding us against this sin, realising that we could actually participate in outward, external religious ritual of prayer as a cover-up for what is lacking in our private life. The Lord is saying, as is indeed the theme right throughout this sermon: 'You must have reality, rather than ritual. You must have relationship, rather than religion'. If God sees you, you won't care how many other people see you! If you are desirous to come before God for His eyes and for His heart and for His pleasing alone, it doesn't matter who will see you, it doesn't matter if no-one sees you. 'If God hears you', the Lord is saying, 'what does it matter if no-one else hears?'.

So we come to the Lord Jesus in His divine diagnosis of our prayer lives. The first thing that we find in verse 5 are these words, the Lord says: 'When thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward'. Now, here's the Lord's question to us today: is your public prayer a show? Is your public prayer life a show? The Lord is asking: are you a praying hypocrite? We learnt last week of how 'hypocrite' was a Greek word that simply meant an actor that used a mask, a person that stood on a stage and portrayed a particular role. You see, the Lord is saying we can perform in our prayers, we can act in our prayers, we can pray for the benefit of others - to be seen of men. In other words, if you get up in the prayer meeting and you pray as if you're consumed with zeal after God, you act as if no-one can get you down - but at home when you pray there is no zeal, there is no desire, and perhaps there's no prayer at all!

We get to our feet, and we pray for the Lord to save people - but we never would dream of bringing someone to the Gospel meeting for various reasons, perhaps even for the most awful reason: that we're going out to supper and we don't want anyone spoiling our night by getting saved! We can pray these things, and the reason we pray them is for people - we pray them because that is what the church expects you to pray, and we pray these things to be seen of men! That's why the Lord cites the synagogues and the street corner, because the synagogue is where zealous people met and the street corners are where all sorts of people met. So if you want to be seen to be zealous in front of other zealous people, and you want to be seen to be even more zealous than they are, you'll go where the zealous people are. But if you want to be rewarded of men as a holy man of God standing above the rest, you will go to the street corner to be seen of men where the people gather.

If you know anything about the Pharisees you will know that they were obliged to pray many times a day, and they took care that when that call for prayer happened that they were in the midst of the city, perhaps in the marketplace for the hour of prayer, and they had to pray in front of everybody around about them. Both the synagogues and the street corners, the Lord says, can be a theatrical platform for hypocrites to perform their acting - actors must perform, they can't help it, they need, they crave attention of people, they want to hog the limelight and they can even do it in their prayers! Here is the issue, here's the Lord cutting to the very bone of this matter, and it is this to us today: is our attendance at the prayer meeting, is our participation in the prayer meeting, simply to keep up appearances?

When you are asked to go to a prayer meeting, do you ever think: 'What would people think if I didn't go? I have to go, they might think I'm not spiritual if I don't go!'. Can I say: God hates that! God hates hypocrisy of

every colour and shade, and I believe that the closer you get to God the more you will get His heart, and you will hate hypocrisy! You'll see it more and more in yourself, you'll not see it more in others as we tend to do, but you'll see it in your own heart and it will absolutely turn you! Watchman Nee said: 'It is natural to a man of the flesh and blood to hide his shortcomings, but grace enables one to hide his strengths'. You see, when a person is newly converted they want to hide their weaknesses from the folk around in the fellowship - but I believe as they grow in faith, they're more willing to let their weaknesses be exposed before others, and still the more they grow their weakness becomes eliminated by the grace of God. Now, where are we on that scale? Are we at the point where we're trying to hide our weaknesses? Or are we at the point where we're willing to bring them into the light that God's grace can handle them and deliver us from them?

The issue in this passage of Scripture again is the issue of reward. The Lord is saying that there are only two times when believers can be rewarded. You will either be rewarded now, or you will be rewarded in the future. You will either be rewarded now through the praise of men, or you will be rewarded in the future from the praise of God Almighty - but the Lord is saying no-one can have both rewards! If you want to receive man's reward now you cannot obtain God's reward then, and if you want to receive God's reward then you cannot and you ought not to be hankering after man's rewards and praise now. You cannot seek to enjoy great fame on earth, and then expect a high position in the Kingdom of Heaven to come. Therefore, do you know what the Lord is saying? This is amazing to me: 'You' - David Legge - 'who want to be seen to be the greatest preacher. You who want to be the greatest Sunday School teacher. You who want to be the greatest personal worker. You who want to be the greatest Gospel singer. You must refuse that on earth if you want to be rewarded in heaven!'. That is death to the soul.

Is your public prayer life a show? Why would it be a show? Your public prayer life would be a show because your private prayer life is a sham. That's what verse 6 says, your public prayer life is a show because your private prayer life is a sham. Look at verse 6: 'Thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet', into thy inner chamber, 'and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly'. The question the Lord is asking is: does your public prayer life portray your private life, or is it a decoy to cover it up? In other words, the fact that you stand to your feet in a prayer meeting, or the fact that you come along to a prayer meeting, does that declare that you are praying at home, or is it a decoy and a cover-up that you are not praying at home?

The Lord speaks of the inner chamber, and that simply means a bedroom. That tells you and I that prayer is not restricted to one individual place, indeed Paul said to Timothy: 'Pray in every place'. But the point that the Lord is saying is that your bedroom might be occupied by more than yourself, it might be only yourself but it might be your family - particularly in these days. But His point is, in the daytime the family were probably out at work or school, and then at night time the family would be tucked into bed and asleep - so it's a quiet place for you if you want to get alone with God, it's a place of secrecy between you and your Lord.

It has come to us already this morning, through the witness to the children, that our Lord had no inner chamber. Our Lord had no place to lay His head, but what He did was He used the wilderness. He used the mountains and the hills of Judea as His inner chamber, and David prophetically speaking of the Lord said: 'I watch and am become like a sparrow that is alone upon the housetop'. The Lord, early in the morning in the cool of the day, went out to a place of secrecy, to a place of holy separation, and sought God upon His face. Isaac went into a field, Peter went onto the top of a house, the Lord Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane went a little further and prayed. Many a time He departed into a solitary place and there prayed. Paul, after his conversion, went to a house in Damascus - and God Almighty looked down and said: 'Behold, he prayeth!', and you can almost hear the joy in the very heart of God as He saw one of His children newly converted upon their knees praying in secret!

'Thy Father sees in secret'! It brings joy to the Father's heart to see you pray in secret. He even sees a cup of water that is given in His name in secret - even that's not ignored! But here is what the Lord is saying:

believers, you cannot substitute a public prayer meeting for personal prayer - it cannot be done! The thing, I think most forcibly, that has come to me in this week studying these verses of Scripture is the fact that God will reward secret prayer. The word for 'reward' is 'recompense', and it points forward to the Judgement Seat of Christ and God's Kingdom here upon the earth. It's not talking simply about your answers to prayer, for you get your answers to prayer down here, it's talking about a reward up there. Isn't that amazing, to think that we will be rewarded in the future for how we have prayed in the secret place where no one else has watched? That is a sobering thought, for then our hypocrisy will be shown up. The Lord says: 'There is nothing hid which shall not be manifested, neither was anything kept secret but it shall come abroad and will be known'.

Now here's the questions that the Lord poses to us today: do I pray more frequently and fervently at home alone than I do in public? Do I love the secret place of prayer, just God and me together? Or is my public praying simply an overflow of my private praying, and what will be my reward in eternity for my secret prayer today? What would God give you for your prayers this morning? If the answer is 'no' and negative to many of those questions, the declaration and diagnosis of the word of God on us is that we are hypocrites. Our public prayer life is a show, because our private prayer life is a sham.

Now, what the Lord is trying to bring us to is verse 7: 'When ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking'. He's asking the question: your prayer life will be a sham, it will be a show, if your prayer life is only an external frame - vain repetitions. If you use meaningless words and phrases to prolong your prayer, in other words if you do it to make yourself feel that you're praying. You're doing something good, but there's nothing in it, there's no meaning. You use much speaking, the Lord says - now please note that that doesn't say 'much praying' - 'much speaking'. It's not talking about using the same words in prayer, it's not talking about praying for the same thing perseveringly and over and over again, it is talking about empty, vain repetitious words where you think you will be heard because of the many words you use. It cannot mean repetition, because the Lord Jesus three times in the Garden of Gethsemane prayed the same words. Paul the apostle three times prayed that the Lord would take the thorn from his flesh, and God answered him. But for Paul and for the Lord Jesus those prayers of repetition were in private, and those prayers were certainly not motivated to be seen of men because there was no-one to see.

But we are talking about here is 'lip labour', praying much for public support and praise. Men who love to hear themselves! The point behind it all is this: if you wanted a man to hear you, if you want your little child to hear you, what do you do? You repeat things over and over, that's how they learn. The Lord Jesus is saying: 'You are approaching God as you would approach a man. You're repeating over and over and over again and again, because you think by doing that He'll hear you' - but that's not how God hears, for God is not a God who reads your mouth, God is a God who looks into the depths of your heart!

The Jew prayed formalised prayers, he prayed the Sh'mah that you find in Deuteronomy 6 every morning and every evening as early as possible - in fact in the Jewish books it says as soon as the light was strong enough for a man to distinguish between blue and green he was to pray. What about that for law? He was to pray before nine o'clock in the morning, and he couldn't pray after nine in the evening. No matter where he was or whatever he was doing, if it was his last opportunity he was to stop and to pray. Inevitably, you can imagine, if you were out doing the shopping or if you were in business and that hour comes, you have to pray in public - and some of the Jews even prayed as they were on the way, to get it done and to rush through it! There was another prayer called the Sh'moneh Esray that was 18 prayers prayed daily three times over and over, and it became like a spell, it became like an incantation at 9 o'clock, at 12 o'clock, and then at 3 in the afternoon - like the Muslim calls to prayer!

There was a story once told of a Muslim who was chasing after another man with a knife to kill him, and when the call for prayer rang out around the city he took his little prayer mat, he laid it down, he prayed his

prayer quickly, and then he got up and continued to run murderously after the man! That's what the Lord is talking about: praying for praying's sake, prayer for the benefit of others or a religion or a system, prayer to impress, prayer - even in our prayer meetings - to make a point to someone else in the meeting, prayer to rebuke another brother, prayer to display your knowledge of the Scripture, prayer to show off how many verses that you've learnt! The other side of the coin is criticism of other men's prayers, when you go to a new believer or you go to a man who is truly praying from his heart, and you criticise them ungraciously, and they end up never praying again!

Pharisaism is rife in the church of Jesus Christ. A great preacher once described an ornate and elaborate prayer offered in a Boston church by a great preacher as the most eloquent prayer offered to a Boston audience. Many have a formula for starting their prayers, others pray the same prayers over and over again. Dr Robert A. Cook said on many occasions: 'All of us have one routine prayer in our system, and once we get rid of it then we can really start to pray!'. I heard recently of a meeting where a man used to get up every week and pray the same prayer like rote over and over again, and the rest congregation could nearly repeat it. They used to sigh inwardly every time this man got to his feet, and on one occasion one of the big men in the assembly couldn't take it any longer. When the man got into full steam of his rigmarole of rote praying, this man stood to his feet and he said: 'Oh, Lord, You've heard it all before, Amen!'. The problem was, the Lord hadn't heard anything!

Vain repetition, do you know what that is? It's what the heathens did in 1 Kings 18. You know the prophets of Baal, who were trying to get the power of their false god down upon the sacrifice? It said that from morning even until noon, until the evening sacrifice, they cry out, they cut their flesh, they prayed to their god - but there was neither voice nor any answer. It was a kind of hypnosis, an intoxication of words, a bit like the charismatic movement today and their false gift of tongues. But by contrast, there was the prophet Elijah and he made one prayer of faith to God, and it was answered immediately and the fire of God fell!

The amazing thing to me is that the prayers of the Bible are straightforward, concise, short and to the point - the best I can give you is Matthew 8:25 where one poor soul just cried out: 'Save, Lord!'. If you're not saved today you don't need any elaborate words, you maybe don't need all the knowledge that you might think you have, all you need to do as a simple soul is humbly cry out: 'Save me Lord!'. The Lord isn't prohibiting long praying, He's not prohibiting persistent praying, but what He is saying to us today is: it's not the length of your sentences and the big words that you use and the flowery phrases that secures your answer, but it is the state of your heart!

Is your prayer life an external frame, or here's the crux of the matter, verse 8 - it is an external frame when our hearts, our internal heart-life, is a farce. 'Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him'. People could use false reasoning and say: 'Well, if God knows what I'm going to ask for then what's the point in me asking?'. Well, the first thing is that the Lord has told us to ask, so that's enough point in asking. But what the Lord is saying here is that it's not that we ought to multiply our words to God, we don't get answers to our prayer because we pray reportingly. In other words: 'Lord, did You know Aggie is in hospital in Ward 15? Lord, You know that man two doors down in the fifth house along, You know his name and his address?' - you don't need to give the Lord all those things, the Lord isn't looking for information in your prayers, the Lord isn't looking for a report or for words, but what the Lord is looking for is the disposition of your heart. As you come to God are you realising that God knows everything about you? God knows all your needs, God knows what you're going to ask before you ask it, is that the disposition of your heart?

Prayer is not just getting things from God, but prayer is getting into a perfect communion with God. The point of the Lord Jesus is this: are we depending on our own earnestness, are we depending on our own ability to quote verses, are we depending on our own understanding of the theology of prayer, or are we

depending on God's goodness? The goodness of God that knows what you need before you ask it! It is that confidence toward God that makes the difference, it is that faith toward Him that gets our prayers answered. That's why John said: 'This is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will He hears us' - the confidence is Jesus! He is our confidence. We have only have boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus.

Do you want your prayers heard? You must have the disposition of faith. The Lord is saying: 'You'll not be heard because you have a mouthful of words, but rather you have a heart full of faith in the goodness and the faithfulness of God'. Now let's ask the question as we close, we asked it last week, we ask it this week, we'll ask it next week and the next week: are our eyes on God, or are our eyes fixed on men? Why do we pray? Is our prime motive in prayer to know Him, or to know the praise of others? Are we playing at prayer? M'Cheyne made a wonderful statement, he said: 'What a man is on his knees he is and no more'. If you give me a man with his head filled with unused knowledge, and another man whose knowledge is far less but his knees are bent more - give me that man of prayer every time!

I've given you this illustration before, but I close with it as a poem. Listen very carefully:

'From a convert in Uganda
Comes to us a story grander
In the lesson that it teaches,
Than a sermon someone preaches,
For it tells what sore temptations
Come to them what need of patience,
And a need, all else outweighing,
Of a place of private praying.

So each convert chose a corner,
Far away from eyes of scorner -
In the jungle where he could
Pray to God in solitude.
And so often went he thither
That the grass would fade and whither
Where he trod, and you can trace
By the paths each praying place.

If they hear the evil tidings
Of a brother's late backslidings,
And some are even saying
'He no longer cares for praying' -
Then they say to one another,
Softly and so gently: 'Brother,
Do forgive us now for showing,
On your path the grass is growing!'

The erring one, relenting,
Soon is bitterly repenting:
'Ah! How sad I am at knowing
On my path the grass is growing.
But it shall be so no longer,
Prayer I need to make me stronger.
On my path I'll oft be going
Soon no grass will there be showing".

May we say today: 'Lord, teach me to pray'. Now, let's bow our heads, and if you're not converted here this morning I'm sure there have been times in your life when you have lifted your heart to God in prayer - but you know that God is not obliged to listen to your prayers because you have never lifted to Him the most important prayer: the prayer of repentance and faith in Christ. It's time you prayed that prayer and opened up a way of relationship with God. Believers, when I preach on prayer what happens is the prayer meeting is full on Thursday night - that's not what I'm looking for today, because it will be empty the following week. I want you to examine your heart, the Lord is saying: 'It's not your body on the seat, it's your heart at the throne of grace that matters'. We don't want to pack the prayer meeting, we want pray-ers at home and here in the assembly - and if you're praying at home, my friend, you will be at the prayer meeting praying from your heart.

Father, we thank Thee for the teaching of the Lord, and we pray that we will be gracious disciples and servants who will meekly receive His word and obey, that we will be joyful givers as we give our lives in adoration and savours of prayer to Thee morning and evening and afternoon, sacrificing ourselves in prayer to Thee. Lord, there is a great day of judgement coming for Thy people where their works will be tested, and Lord we pray that when we reach that great throne that our hands will not be empty of private prayer, but it will be full to overflowing in blessing and reward in eternity. Take us now to our homes, we pray, with Thy blessing. In Jesus' name, Amen.

The Sermon On The Mount - Chapter 14

"The Disciples' Prayer"

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Matthew 6:9-15

Now we're turning again today to Matthew's gospel chapter 6, Matthew chapter 6. We've been dealing with these three aspects of righteousness that the Lord Jesus is speaking about - in the Jewish faith they were three holy things that a holy man of God or, woman of God, engaged in. So the Lord is addressing them, and we've already looked at almsgiving, last Lord's Day morning we looked at prayer - both of which were looking at the motivation of these exercises. We looked at 'Why Are You Working For The Lord?' - why are you giving? And also 'Why Are You Praying?'.

The Lord - as He doesn't do in the other two instances of almsgiving and fasting - He carries on speaking about what we should pray and how we should pray. That is what we intend to study this morning, beginning at verse 9. The Lord says: "After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen. For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses".

Let's just bow in a moment's prayer together: Our Father we thank Thee for the great gift of prayer. We believe that it is probably the most holiest exercise that man can engage in down here on earth. Therefore as we come to Thee through this medium, we pray Thy blessing, we ask for Thy help, we ask for Thy guidance and for the teaching of the Holy Spirit from Thy Word. We need to know how to pray - we come to Thee as the disciples did, and we say 'Lord, teach us to pray'. Teach us how to pray, teach us what to pray and what manner to engage in prayer. So we ask Thy help now, and we ask the filling of Thy Holy Spirit for the preacher and for the people in the pew as they listen, that they may have the grace of God to receive the word of God in their hearts and implement it in their lives. Lord, we need Thee - if anything that is what prayer is: it is the expression of total and utter dependence upon Almighty God. So we need Thee now, and we pray that Thou wilt meet our need, for Christ's sake. Amen.

I don't intend to go into an in-depth study of the Lord's prayer today, simply because we're engaged in a much larger study of the Sermon on the Mount and we haven't got too much time to engage in individual studies within that larger study. If the Lord wills and tarries, hopefully in the future at some time we may be allowed to go into more depth with the Lord's Prayer.

Books on prayer are never-ending. I don't know whether you have been in a bookshop lately, a Christian bookshop, and browsed around the shelves and gone into the prayer section - but there are new books on prayer coming out and being released every week. There's no better subject that books could be written upon, let me hasten to add, and I have probably read more books on prayer than I have on anything else or any other subject. From the reading of books on prayer I am sure you have found, and I have found, that the methods of prayer and men's ideas about what an ideal prayer is, are varied.

What should be the ingredients of a good prayer? It's good to have books, and thank the Lord for books, but it's always important - I believe - when it comes to things spiritual to look to our Lord Jesus Christ, the

Author and the Finisher of our faith, to see what He taught and what He did. Here in this prayer that we have, between verses 9 through to 13 in chapter 6 of Matthew's gospel, we have the Lord Jesus' pattern for prayer - if you like: the Master's blueprint for the way we ought to pray. We have the necessary ingredients of prayer according to Jesus Christ the Lord. That is right, and we would expect that simply because in verse 8 the Lord Jesus had already told us: "Your Heavenly Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before you ask him". Therefore God knows what we need, therefore God in flesh - the Lord Jesus Christ - is coming to us and, knowing what we need, He tells us what we ought to pray for and how we ought to pray. He is telling us: 'These are the things that you need to pray for'.

If you were here last Lord's Day you would have seen from the first part of verse 7 that when we pray we are not to repeat things ritualistically over, vain repetitions, empty religious systems of men. He is warning against ritualism, He is telling us that prayers must be motivated from the heart - and we have been teaching that, and of course we believe it. But to the other extreme, it is important that when we pray - and I'm thinking, and I believe the Lord is thinking more personally now - in your own home, when you close the closet door behind you and you pray to God in secret where God alone can see and God alone can hear, there ought to be order in our prayer. All things in our prayer life ought to be done decently and in order.

Here we have, in the words of Lord Jesus Christ, the God-given order for our prayers. I believe today, personally, each one of us, it is our responsibility before God and Christ to realign our personal prayer life with the Saviour's pattern. It is commonly called 'The Lord's Prayer', and that's a bit of a misnomer because - yes, it came from the Lord's lips, but it came from the Lord's lips for the benefit and the use of His own disciples. We know that because the Lord Jesus could never have prayed this prayer, because one of the clauses within it asks God to forgive us our sins - and the Lord Jesus was apart from sin, He was always the sinless One. I prefer to call it 'The Disciples' Prayer' - and that is the title of our study today.

He didn't give us this prayer to be recited a certain number of times on the Lord's Day, or even days during the week. He gave it to keep us from using vain repetitions, so we ought not to take this prayer and vainly repeat it without any meaning or without any heart. Let me say this: it is not wrong to pray this prayer, what we need to guard against is praying it in vain repetition without our hearts being in the midst of it. Note please that the Lord Jesus didn't say: 'Pray in these words', He said: 'Pray after this manner' - that is, use this prayer as a pattern, not as a substitute for what is in your heart. Some have said that this is only a Jewish prayer, of course some believe that the Sermon on the Mount is purely Jewish, and therefore this prayer is not meant to be used by the church today but by a Jewish remnant in the Great Tribulation period in the future. I am sure that it indeed will be used in that period by that Jewish remnant, but to say that ought not to be used today in the church of Jesus Christ, I would say to you is verging on the error of ultra-dispensationalism. Now, we haven't got time to go into that today, but perhaps again we will go into it.

The very fact that it is found not just in Matthew's gospel, but in Luke's gospel - a Gentile gospel - is an indication that God wanted this prayer to be used as a pattern by Jewish and by Gentile believers. If you take a casual look down at this prayer you will see that there is nothing in it that cannot be used by Christians who are Gentiles. In fact, the fact that God is addressed as 'Our Father' is all the warrant that we need to use this prayer as members of the family of God. Certainly the epistles that we have in God's further revelation would add more to this prayer, things that we need to pray about that Paul tells us through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. But we can use this prayer today as a pattern in our personal lives.

The theme of this prayer, I believe, more than anything is the will of God for us. God's will, all that He desires to accomplish speedily in our lives, what He expects the church - believers - to pray for during the thousands of years of His absence. So let's look at it, let's look at the ingredients of prayer. I've divided it into two, and the first point is simply this: our praying should be God-centred, our praying should be God-centred. If you want to give a theological name to that you could call it: 'Adoration' - coming with God on

our minds as we come in prayer. If you count down this prayer you find that the word 'thy' appears three times, and the word 'us' appears four times. As you read it doesn't take long to find out that there is a reversal of the order of person in life's grammar. What I mean by that is simply this: our English grammar, the different persons, goes like this: the first person is 'I', the second person is 'you', and the third person is 'he'. But we find in this Disciple's Prayer that that is an old-style, and now there is the new order and, if you like, the new grammar of the Christian is reversed. The first person is 'He' - God, the second person still remains 'you', and the third person is put last - 'I' must come last.

The Sermon on the Mount is paralleled in the law of God in the Old Testament, we've seen that in how the Lord addresses specifically the ten commandments. I think I told you in recent weeks that the first half of the commandments are our responsibilities God-ward, the second half of the commandments are our responsibilities to God man-ward. You find it in the Sermon on the Mount reflected from the law, and now we are finding it in the Disciple's Prayer - the first half of the prayer is God-ward, and the second half is man-ward. So there are three things that I want you to note - God-ward - how we are to make God the centre of our prayers. It divides into three: relationship, reverence, and reversal.

Let's begin with the first: relationship. The Lord Jesus says: 'Pray after this manner: Our Father which art in heaven'. Now does this mean - and here we go, people read into these things - does this mean that we cannot pray to the Lord Jesus? Does this mean that we cannot pray to the Holy Spirit? I do not believe it does mean these things, but what I believe the Lord is instructing us to do is: the normal practice of prayer, the norm, is to address God the Father through the Son by the Holy Spirit. Verse 9: 'Our Father which art in heaven' - He is the object of our prayer. What the Lord is focusing us to at the very beginning of His instruction and His teaching on prayer is: our prayer must be directed to God, for God is the Place and the Person that assures us of love, and power, and dignity, and majesty, and deity. We come and we name God's name as our Father because, at that very outset of prayer, at the introduction when we begin to pray, that name 'Our Father' will raise our affections, will confirm our confidence in God, and the effectiveness of what it means to pray to God.

He is a divine being, but the reason why we address Him as 'Our Father' is because He is a divine being with our best interests at His heart. Oh, it's thrilling, isn't it? We are invited to draw near to Him. John could say: 'Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us that we should be called the sons of God'. He is our Father by covenant relationship through the Lord Jesus Christ. He said before He left this earth to His disciples: 'I ascend unto My Father and your Father, and to your God and to My God'. He is our Father by regeneration, Peter tells us that when we are born-again of the Spirit of God we are made partakers of the divine nature.

'Our Father' - that's mighty! Don't miss that word 'our', for that means that all Christians know - all true Christians - know God as their Father. Now the world cannot address God in this way. The Lord Jesus said: 'If you're not saved, ye are of your father the devil' - and there is nowhere in scripture, in God's word, that we find the universal fatherhood of God to all men. My friend, if you're saved you can call God 'Father' - but if you're not, if you're unregenerate and unconverted you can't come to God knowing Him as a loving Father, you can't ask for the things that are prayed for in this prayer. My friend, I would urge you to come to God through Jesus, the Son. There is no universal fatherhood of God in the scripture, but what there is is the universal brotherhood of Christians - 'Our Father'. You go right through this prayer and there are no singular pronouns - you don't find 'I' in it at all, everything is plural. God is saying: 'When you come to Me as your Father, remember that you're not an only child. When you come to Me, remember that you're one of a great company, a worldwide family of believers. Therefore, when you come, don't just ask for yourself'. We express our love for our family, don't we, in various ways in our own homes? God is simply saying: 'You're in the family of God now, and the way I want you to express love to your worldwide family is to pray for them, to pray for their needs over and above your own needs'.

'Our Father which art in heaven'. If 'Our Father' speaks to us of the worldwide family of God and the nature of God toward us in compassion, and love, and goodness; 'which art in heaven' must speak to us of faith as we come to God, that we're realising that God is above us but we are putting faith in Him as above us. Without faith it's useless to pray. You see, that's what Paul meant when he said in Hebrews: 'Without faith it is impossible to please God, for he that cometh to God must believe that He is'. When we come to God and say: 'Our Father which art in heaven', that's meant to be a declaration that we believe that there is a God in heaven. We bow before that God, and that whole introduction of this prayer is meant to raise from our breast such feelings and emotions, and it's meant to extract from the names of God, and the character and attributes of God, such a sweetness of our relationship with God that it inspires us to pray and to know that, as we come to God, He is a God who can and wants to answer our prayer.

Boy, what a relationship! My friend, do you have that relationship today? 'Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name'. The fact that God is in heaven should fill us with humility. We are only creatures of the dust, it should fill us with awe, we should fall at God's feet as dead men. I know, and you know, that God is everywhere - we cannot limit God to simply being in heaven. But within the Scriptures heaven is seen as the place of God's presence in a special sense. It's seen to be, if you like, the place where God has prepared His throne for judgement - but it's more than that: it's the place where God has prepared His throne in grace. That's why we talk about coming to the throne of grace.

There was a little military drummer, on one occasion, who was asked why - if God is everywhere - the Lord's Prayer speaks of Him as being in heaven? With the smartness of a little soldier he answered: 'Because that's headquarters!'. Isn't that it? When you think about it for a moment: God is there, our Lord is there, our names are there, our life is there, our future inheritance is there, our citizenship is there, and our heart ought to be there! Oh, what have we been learning in the Sermon on the Mount? Whether it's alms, whether it's prayer, whether it's fasting - who has our eyes to be on? Has your eyes to be on the Pastor, or on the members, or on the elders, or the deacons, or so-and-so across the road from you? No, our eyes are to be on God! If our eyes are on God, we will see His majesty, His reverence, and His greatness. Our eyes are not upon men, our eyes are not upon false gods in temples on the earth, but we are the people that worship the God of heaven - the true and the living God!

It speaks of His transcendence, and I would ask you today: what difference would it make if, when you came to God in prayer, you had a disposition that was saturated and enthused and soaked in the recognition of who you were coming to, and in the awareness of where your voice was heard - in heaven? It's lovely when I read, and it was in my reading this morning, where the Lord Jesus Christ - it says He lifted His eyes toward heaven. Do you know why He did that? Because He knew that's where power was, He knew that was where the place was where we obtain blessings that we need. Prayer needs to be from the heart, it needs to communicate with God not with the lips but with the heart - the reason being: there's no physical voice on earth that can rend the skies and go into heaven, but it is the heart pangs, the voice of our sighs and our groans before God, that will reach His own ears. If that's the case, if we are praying: 'Our Father which art in heaven', we need to be severed, divorced, detached, and wrenched from this earth! Some of us have our moorings tied and our foundations dug deep, and our desires are not heavenly.

This is what God enjoins His children throughout all the centuries to do: to worship Him, to hallow His name! Isn't that what the Lord taught us? That is worship, and when we go into the Old Testament we find there that King David felt that this part of prayer - adoration - was so important that he appointed a select group of men who did nothing else in the temple but praise and worship God day and night! In the book of the Revelation, we see four special angels - John saw them - and they existed solely to worship God, and they rest not day and night saying: 'Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come'. Do you remember the words of the Lord to the Samaritan woman in John 4: 'The hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship' - notice it doesn't say 'worship God' - 'worship the Father in

spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him'. You can't worship God unless He is your Father, and you can't have Him as your Father unless there is that regenerated covenant relationship. Do we have the relationship? Now listen, in a world that thrives on, and a church that loves a casual approach to God: is there reverence?

Then there is reversal. He says: 'Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven'. The reason why I call that reversal is simply: God's will is always done in heaven, but the Lord wants us to pray that God's will would be done on earth - it's a reversal of what we know to be the norm. First of all let me deal with this: 'Thy kingdom come'. Now the Greek tense of the word 'come' in this passage, I'm led to believe, indicates a cataclysmic arrival of the kingdom of God in one specific point of time, in one act. It speaks of the millennial reign of the Lord Jesus Christ that is prophesied in the Old Testament and seen in Revelation chapter 20 - the kingdom of God established on the earth. Of course it can also mean the spiritual, for on earth at this moment men do not carry out God's will on earth, do they? The purpose of God right throughout all time, from the beginning to the ending, will be to have His will and purpose done on earth as it is in heaven - for in heaven God's name is hallowed, in heaven God's will is done. Yet on earth there is another name that is hallowed, for this old world lieth in the lap of the wicked one - he is the god of this age, he is the prince of this generation.

We are going to and fro, and meant to be preaching the Gospel, in order that people will be released from the bondage of the god of this world, and that they will have the kingdom of God in their hearts - in order to deliver them from hand of the evil one, so that they may hallow God's name and submit themselves to His authority. That's what this is talking about: submission before God. It is our monumental responsibility to bring the kingdom of God to earth. How are we to do it? Through prayer. How has God ordained that He bring His purposes into planning and into actuality in this earth? Through your prayers. So prayer is not, as commonly thought, the means of getting our will done, it is the means of getting God's will done on earth as it is in heaven.

Now in the remaining time let's look at the second half. We've looked at how our praying should be God-centred adoration. We're to have a relationship, we're to have reverence, and there's to be reversal. But now we look at our praying and how it ought to be needs-motivated. Needs-motivated, if you like, petition - the first half is adoration, the second half is petition. In verses 9 to 10 we've found that God comes first, and that has to be the way. You see, you can't pray aright for your friends, for your loved ones and for the lost, unless you honour God, unless you have that relationship and reverence, unless God's will is in your life. Unless God is dominant in your heart you may forget about praying for other people! I think it's interesting to look at these three things: first of all provision, pardon, and preservation. That's what you find here, and all three of these things that the Lord instructs us to pray for: there is a Member, a Person of the Trinity, that is involved with each of them.

Father is the one who provides, in His kindness, for our temporal needs. The Son is the one who, through His sacrificial death, provides mediation and atonement. The Holy Spirit is that one, through His gracious operations, who delivers us day by day from evil. Let's look at the first: provision. He instructs us: 'Pray: Give us this day our daily bread'. Now this has come forcibly to my heart, Watchman Nee said: 'Because Christians do not hoard on earth, therefore they must ask for their daily bread'. We'll be taught later in this Sermon not to hoard on earth, but to build our treasures in heaven. We need to pray for our daily bread because we do not value things down here. There is the daily nature of this prayer, the daily bread, and that means we need to be praying daily for all our needs. Job could say, concerning the word of God: 'I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food'. Prayer is the same: we ought to see prayer and God's word more necessary than feeding ourselves - and we'll see this in the next study where we come to fasting, because fasting is when you come to God with a need that is so necessary that you haven't time to eat, you don't even have a desire to eat!

I love the rendering of 1 Peter 5 verse 7 that goes like this: 'Casting all your care upon Him, for it matters to Him about you'. My friends, we can ask for our daily bread because we have a Heavenly Father that loves us! It's not just bread, the Lord is communicating to us that whatever we need, whatever is lacking in our lives that is necessary - not our wants now, but our needs! - we have a Heavenly Father that would give it to us! Parents, does it matter to you if your child is fed? Do you not think it matters to God? A little child was once explaining to a grown-up what happened in heaven when she prayed, and she said this simply in her childlike faith: 'When I say my prayers, God stops all the music and He says: 'Quiet please! There's a little girl down there who wants to talk to Me''. Isn't that lovely? He hears us because we are His children.

A busy mother, through all the clamour of life downstairs, is wonderfully able to hear the faint cry of the child upstairs, isn't she? So the Father, above all the din of this world, all the turmoil, and even all the delight of heaven, is able to hear the cry of the least of His children! Do you remember Ishmael being left behind that bush, dying of thirst? We don't read in the Scriptures that he said anything, but we do read this: 'God heard the voice of the lad' - He heard his cry! It's not words, it's the heart.

Provision: He will provide your needs. Then there's pardon, for He instructs us to pray: 'Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors' - forgive! Now, there's often confusion comes with this verse, because what the Lord is speaking of here is not the forgiving of justification, the initial forgiving of salvation. That is once-for-all and never needs to be repeated, but what the Lord is speaking of is the daily defilement that we pick up of sin, as we move around in this world. It's not the bathing of the body, as the Lord illustrated, but it is the washing of the feet. It's not salvation, but it speaks of fellowship, it speaks of keeping short accounts with God in confession - but the mighty thing about this passage that rocks us all is this: if we are not willing and able to forgive others, we will not obtain this forgiveness of the Father! Not that you won't be saved - that's initial forgiveness - but if you want to walk in fellowship with the Lord and have no clouds in between, you must forgive other people or you will not have that fellowship!

Verses 14 and 15 bear that principle out. There was once a boy who thought this prayer went like this: 'Forgive us our trash baskets, as we forgive those who put trash in our baskets' - very apt, isn't it? People who shovel things upon you: hurt and pain - and you forgive them, it is essential that you forgive them for the question the Lord asks is this: 'Will God allow two believers who are at odds with one another to enter His kingdom together?'. Either neither of them will enter in, or one of them will fail to enter. That's what John said in his epistle: 'If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?'. Guy King says this: 'More Christians than one cares to contemplate are spiritually bereft and barren because they will not make up with someone with whom they have quarrelled. Well, let them not delude themselves: singing hymns, performing duties, making vows will be of no avail - they will walk this earth unforgiven of the Father until that thing has been put right. Only then will they have the peace of mind again, when in all humility and honesty they can pray: 'Forgive us as we forgive''.

Provision, pardon, and finally: preservation. He teaches us to pray: 'Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from all evil', or the evil one. This, perhaps, is the hardest verse in this passage, and one of the hardest verses to understand in the Bible - because the word of God teaches that temptations, or a better word is 'testings', are necessary for the believer. In fact, of themselves they may be an evil temptation, but if we as God's children resist them they are helpful - and God allows them in order that we be strengthened in our faith, and be able to resist more and be more holy. Therefore what the Lord is saying here is, not that we be prayed out of any testing and that we have an easy ride as a Christian, and our life is free from all testing, but the Lord is asking us to pray that we be saved from being overcome by temptations, that we be saved from being overcome by fresh sin. After we confess our sins, forgive others their sins, that when we come and face that sin again that we will not be overcome - it's a recognition of our own weakness before God.

Isn't it apt to come to something like this? I hope as you've been going through the Sermon on the Mount that you have a desire in your heart to try and live it - I have, but it's difficult. That's why we need to come to God and present our weakness to Him. God doesn't tempt us, but He allows temptation to strengthen us. God never promised to keep us from temptation, but what He has done is promise to preserve us through temptation. I think the best commentary on this verse is Paul's words in Corinthians: 'There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man, but God is faithful who will not suffer you to be tempted above that you are able, but will with the temptation also make a way of escape' - a fire escape - 'that you may be able to bear it'. All the trials and all the troubles within your life, not all of them are designed to make you sin - God allows them at times in order to strengthen you. But this prayer is not for total exemption from them, but for absolute preservation in them! We see the Lord lifting up His holy face again to heaven, and saying: 'Father, I pray not that Thou shouldst take them out of the world, but shouldst keep them from evil'.

'For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen' - a doxology of praise to finish with, as He has started. He is telling us prayer and praise must go together, but He is using God's attributes, God's person, as a plea to enforce His petitions. He's coming to God and presenting to Him that He is a loving God, that He has got power, that He is in charge. He's bringing these requests with scriptural arguments before God in order to encourage God to answer His appeal. There's nothing in ourselves, but oh that we would come with arguments for God's goodness and God's mercy. Then He finishes with 'Amen' - so be it. So be it! Or we could translate it: 'it shall be so!' A statement of faith!

That's what we need to pray. What a prayer: a personal relationship with God and with other believers. We are to exercise faith, we are to worship God, we're to be expectant of His second coming, we're to be submissive to His will, we're to bring before Him petitions, confession. We're to dwell upon His compassion, we're to show dependence and we are to acknowledge His greatness. He knows everything that you and I need, and every aspect of prayer is included in this prayer: adoration, thanksgiving, confession, petition - and the things that are asked for are seven things, which is perfection, the completeness of this outline for prayer!

The purpose of it all is to glorify God's name and to accomplish God's will on earth. It begins with God's name, God's kingdom, God's will. It's the Disciple's Prayer, you can only pray this prayer if you're a disciple. Let us bow our heads, and as we bow our heads we do not do this ritualistically, but I would ask you that you would join with me as we recite these words that are only a pattern - but they are scripture - that we may impress them into our hearts today. Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.

The Sermon On The Mount - Chapter 15

"Why Are You Fasting?"

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by Pastor David Legge
Matthew 6:16-18

Matthew's gospel again and chapter 6, Matthew's gospel and chapter 6 as we continue our studies on the Sermon on the Mount. You remember the Lord Jesus has instructed us that our righteousnesses are to exceed the righteousnesses of the Pharisees - we studied that in depth. All the tape recordings, by the way, of all these studies - we're breaking into the middle here - maybe you haven't heard the rest of them, and it would be good if you could hear something of the background of how we've got to where we are this morning [on the tapes]. But our righteousness is to be of a different kind to the Pharisees - it's to exceed it. One of the ways in which it exceeds it is because it is a heart righteousness. It is not an external righteousness, but it is a heart righteousness.

Chapter 6 has been dealing with acts of righteousness that can be paralleled in the life of the Pharisees, and we've seen that week after week. We looked, first of all, at almsgiving, then we looked at prayer. The last study we did, we looked at the Lord's prayer, and that is His blueprint and His plan for His disciple's praying. Now we're going to look at fasting. These three things - almsgiving, prayer, and fasting - were three of the acts of righteousness that the Pharisees engaged in. But, as we've been learning, there is a fine line between a righteous act and a hypocritical act - a righteous act and a hypocritical act. We've found that these acts of righteousness lend themselves very keenly to hypocrisy, if we do not do them with the right heart.

So let's look this morning at this study in fasting. Verse 16, the Lord Jesus says: "Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; That thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly".

Let us pray together: Our Father, as we come to Thy word this morning we are very conscious that these teachings and principles of the Kingdom are very difficult for us to fulfil. Yet we thank Thee that the Lord Jesus, when He left this scene of time, He told His disciples that He would not leave them orphans, but He would come to them and He would send another to them - the Comforter, the Advocate, the Strengtheners, the Spirit of God who would empower them to do these things. We pray that that same Comforter would have His way with us today. We pray, our Father, that He would have full control of us; that He, through grace, may be able to implement the word of God, that we would not only be hearers of the word, but doers of the same. So Lord, we need Thee at this moment. I need Thee to preach the word, and the folk need Thee to receive with meekness the engrafted word of God. We just pray that we would afresh, just now, give ourselves entirely into Thy care again. We pray, Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on us now. For Christ's sake, Amen.

We've looked at 'Why are you working for the Lord?'. We've also looked at 'Why are you praying to the Lord?'. Now, if you like, we are looking at 'Why are you fasting for the Lord?' - or we could give the title to it: 'When You Fast'. As I was studying again this week in this great Sermon the thought came to me that it would be a lot easier just to get rid of this Sermon altogether. It would be a lot easier for you and I to live the Christian life, if we didn't have these principles to live up to. I think perhaps, in the subconscious of peoples' minds, that's why they like to explain away this Sermon. They like to interpret it as not being for Christians

today. I've already gone into how this will have its full consummation in the eternal Kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ here on the earth, in the millennial reign of Christ, when we will be perfect as the saints of God, and when we will live in righteousness and so on. But there are principles within this Sermon that are applicable to the Kingdom of God which is in our hearts today.

But it would easier just to get rid of it, wouldn't it? There are things that are unique within this Sermon, and if we didn't have them it would be so much easier to live this Christian life that we are called to. It certainly would be a great deal easier if the Lord had not taught us to fast. But yet He says to us in verse 16: "Moreover when ye fast". In verse 2 He said: "When thou doest thine alms". Verse 5: "When thou prayest". Verse 16: "When ye fast". Robert Govett, in his writings on the Sermon on the Mount, uses a tremendous illustration as to how Christians have tried to explain away many of these great doctrines within a holy Christian life. He says this: 'The faith if Christ is like some ancient gothic building devoted to religious services which successive generations have altered to suit their own taste. Here, whitewashing marble; there, bricking up an arch; and yonder, plastering up a window. Hence, he who will study the words of Christ and His apostles, not infrequently comes upon some truth or precept long obstructed and lost out of sight. And he stands delighted like one who finds some beautiful long desolate chamber'.

Down through the years there are many spiritual principles and spiritual truths that the church has chosen, in its 'great wisdom', to disregard, to put to the side. All of a sudden, someone reading the word of God finds that the Lord Jesus says 'When ye fast', and when you discover such a truth as this - that has been laid aside generally - it is revolutionary. It is like a wonderful chamber in a house that has been lost for hundreds of years. Here and there down the ages of the church there have been additions and subtractions of the truths. As we look at the subject of fasting, as our Lord addresses to it here in this sermon, it might conjure up in your mind and your heart these questions: 'Well, fasting, is that not for Roman Catholics? Is that not a monastic thing? Is that not the thing that the Muslims are doing at the moment in the month of Ramadan? Is that not something that is left to the Old Testament, or to religious ritual?'. I address you to the Lord Jesus Christ's words: 'When ye fast'. True fasting, not religious false ritualistic fasting, but true fasting in its essence is Christian because Christ taught it.

If prayer is rare in the church today, fasting must be almost extinct. To a materialistic church and an age in which we can readily fulfil any appetite that we have, and indeed are encouraged by advertisements, and by philosophies within schools, and within universities, and within society at large today, we are encouraged to do that - to satisfy every desire and every appetite that we have - to that kind of society fasting is absolutely irrelevant. In fact, we are told by our modern Christian leaders that we have natural appetites, and those natural appetites are given by God for us to fulfil. It is natural to eat, so why would you not eat? Why would you fast? Particularly in a church, a Western church today - that I more and more am growing to believe wants to be confirmed as normal and as spiritual, and as made comfortable in their lukewarmness - fasting is an unnecessary, ancient, fanatical, over-zealous extreme. It is perhaps in conservatism - if they haven't already doctrinally somersaulted over it, and explained it away - it's understood to be the act of spiritual Olympian, the spiritual giants within the church. It's not for the ordinary Christian.

Let us clear away, very quickly, some of these objections that we have already heard. Some give biblical objections. They say: 'This is an Old Testament thing, and we New Testament Christians, in an age of grace, are not meant to be practising fasting'. Or they say the Lord Jesus was asked: 'Why do your disciples not fast as John the Baptist's disciples are taught to do?', and the Lord Jesus said unto them, 'Can the children of the bride chamber mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come when the bridegroom shall be taken from them and then they shall fast'. The Lord said: 'I am with my people. I am with my disciples. Therefore they don't need to fast now. But when I go they will fast'. Some scholars have interpreted this that the disciples fasted in between the death of the Lord Jesus Christ and His ascension to Heaven. That is when they fasted, but it doesn't refer to us today between the ascension of the Lord Jesus

Christ and His return. They fasted between the Cross and the Resurrection when the Lord Jesus was taken from them, but when He appeared to them again and when He ascended into Heaven there's no need any more for fasting.

Is it just an Old Testament thing? Is it a thing that has been already fulfilled in another dispensation? Well, no it is not, for the teaching of the epistles must be ignored if you are to ignore fasting today. You have to ignore the church at Antioch who commended Barnabas and Saul to the work of God. It says in Acts 13 that when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them they sent them away. In Acts 14 the elders commended workers and they fasted and they prayed. In 2 Corinthians 6 verse 5 Paul says that he was in stripes, he was in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours, in watchings and in fastings often. In 2 Corinthians 11:27 he says again that he was in weariness, painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and in nakedness.

Can I just say to you that as I've been studying the word of God in these recent weeks, it never ceases to amaze me the interpretative lengths to which men will go to exonerate themselves from their God-given responsibilities! They will do anything but obey the word of God! These are men who say that they preach the word of God, men who say that they are fundamental, standing up for the principles of the word of God, but when something doesn't suit them they do all sorts of somersaults to get around it.

Yet in these words of our Lord again, one thing the Lord does not do is teach us to fast. Why? Because He assumes that we are doing it - 'When ye fast...when ye pray...when ye give alms'. Now let me say this: there are no commands within the New Testament to fast. I believe that is not 'there are no principles of fasting' in the New Testament, but there is no specific direct command. I believe that that is the wisdom of the Holy Spirit, because there are some in our gathering here today who cannot fast for medical reasons and for various other reasons. So it is not commanded of a Christian who cannot do it, so don't get into bondage today if you're a diabetic or you've another dietary disorder and you can't fast. Don't worry about that, the Lord knows and He's made you that way, but yet there are principles right throughout scripture.

The question is not 'if you fast', the question here is 'how you fast' - like the previous teachings that we have studied. 'How' primarily focuses on the motivation: 'When you are doing this, don't be doing it like the Pharisees. Your motivation has got to be right in your fasting'. So the real question is not 'if you're fasting', but 'why you are fasting'. Like praying, like almsgiving, are you fasting for your own benefit before God, or before men? Are you living for God or are you living for men? Are you living for the admiration of men or the commendation of God? What is your motivation for the righteous acts that you do? The Lord is saying, if I can paraphrase His words: 'You ought not to want to be seen fasting before men because it is useless if you do that'. It is useless if you do praying, almsgiving, fasting to impress men. It defeats the purpose! Fasting to fast for the benefit of men is useless! Again we see right throughout this Sermon that the motivation is the key differentiating factor between a reward down here at the hands of men, and a reward up there at the hand of God - motivation! Do you fast for God's benefit? Don't fast for your own benefit or for men's benefit. Again our Lord outlines the differences between outward religion and inward relationship, and in so doing He teaches us how to fast.

Before we go on any further can I ask you please: have you ever fasted in your life? I'll leave that one with you. I can't imagine what it would be - in fact, I can't even imagine the possibility of it - a Christian going to heaven who had never prayed in all of his life; let alone the tragedy of a Christian going to heaven without ever fasting.

So we're going to hear from the Lord how we ought to fast, and even if you can't fast there are principles here that apply to all righteous acts, all things that we do to the Lord. The first is this: if you are inwardly starving you will fast to show. If you are inwardly starving you will fast to show off. Again the Lord is

saying: 'If you lack a heart relationship with Me you will crave an external reputation'. No heart relation, you'll want an external reputation. Now listen, this is not talking about public fasting. I'll have to lay that down, because all through the Old Testament there were public fasts. In the New Testament there are public fasts. We find the apostles spoke of fasting publicly together as the church, and overseers fasting and so on. We have fasted publicly together for the Lord's blessing in this assembly, but again what the Lord is addressing right throughout this Sermon, as we've seen in recent weeks, are personal things - the thing of the self, the personal spiritual life in Christ.

To address how to fast we need to address the question: 'What is fasting?' Some believe it not just to be the abstention from food, but abstention perhaps from pleasure or from sleep or from anything that would or could hinder communion between the soul and God. I have to say, biblically, I don't find that anywhere in the scriptures. I find that fasting biblically only ever applies to exemption from food. The word can be applied to other things but that is not the biblical definition of it, and when you fast from food you often fast from other things. One thing that Paul said for prayer and fasting - that you were to fast from sexual relationships in marriage. But fasting, primarily in the word of God, speaks of exemption from food for the purpose of being before God and seeking God.

I've given three definitions here today of what fasting is. You could give 101 definitions, but here's three categories. First, fasting is an expression of humbling oneself before God. It is to humble yourself before God. Here's the big question in the light of what the Pharisees were doing: how can you humble yourself before God by exalting yourself before men? It's impossible!

The second thing that fasting is, is an expression of buffeting one's body, bringing your body into subjection. The reason being that physical laziness and sloth can be one of the greatest enemies in the Christian life that can steal our devotion quicker than anything else. If the devil can't get to us morally by enticing us to sin, he can get to us through apathy and inertia, and I believe that's what's happening in the church today. He says in your conscience: 'You cannot possibly get up this morning to pray. You can't get up this morning. You work hard all week. Who does he think he is, expecting you to get up in the morning to pray? God doesn't expect this of you. God doesn't expect you to fast. He knows that that's higher than you're able'.

Fasting is to buffet the body, to bring the body into subjection. The reason why a great deal of Christians today don't fast is because they don't want to bring their body into subjection. They're quite happy the way things are. But the big question in the light of this scripture is how can you buffet your body if you're flaunting your body ostentatiously before men to show how great you are in spirituality? It's a contradiction! You can't humble yourself before God and then show off before men. You can't buffet your body and then portray how spiritual you are, when the purpose of fasting is realising how sinful you are, and you're humbling yourself before God, and trying to bring yourself into control according to the Spirit.

The third definition of fasting is, it is the expression of seeking the grace of God. Seeking the grace of God! The big question again in the light of the words of the Lord is, why would you focus on man if the purpose of your exercise is to get something from God, and something that only God can give? The only possible reason you were focusing on man is to get something from man, and that is the praise of man. Do you see it?

There are many definitions of fasting. Certainly, it's good for your health, it's good for self-discipline, it prepares us for coming before God, and also it preserves us from becoming slaves to life's habits. It preserves the ability to do without things in life, and to appreciate things that we have all the time all the more. But if we think of it like this - one of the greatest definitions of fasting that I have heard is: 'Prayer', that we have been looking at in recent weeks, 'is attaching yourself to God, but fasting is detaching yourself from the earth'. Can I give you my definition of fasting? It is when your passion for God is so great that you channel all the other natural passions into your passion for God. All other passions and appetites are set aside so that you can follow hard after God. You haven't got time for anything else - this is too important! That's fasting.

Let me say that fasting is never just to deprive ourselves of what is natural - never. God doesn't do that, like the monks do it. He doesn't make us do things that are against nature, but it's in order to, for a short season, focus ourselves entirely on God, our appetites and passions on Him. Therefore I hope you see that you cannot fast, but only with the heart. It is impossible to fast without the heart!

The Jews fasted on the Day of Atonement. They fasted on other feast days. The Pharisees, we read in this passage, fasted twice in the week, on a Monday and on a Thursday. They were fasting but they weren't fasting with the heart. They were inwardly starving so they had to fast outwardly to show off. They had no relationship so they craved a reputation.

Look at verse 16. It says of these Pharisees that they were 'of a sad countenance for they disfigure their faces that they may appear unto men to fast'. This is remarkable. Another translation says 'they are gloomy and sour and dreary; they put on a dismal countenance; they make themselves unsightly in their faces'. They're making themselves look glum, making themselves dreary. They're looking for pity from men and praise from those who they believe to be spiritual. Let me say this: this does not just apply to fasting. These principles here apply to all of the gamut of spiritual life and spiritual truth. If you have a close look at the way we behave today in the church of Jesus Christ, you don't have to look very far to see that some men somehow equate spirituality with gloominess, spirituality with glumness. Can I say to you today, if you have to look and sound miserable to be spiritual there's something wrong with your Christianity!

Maybe I shouldn't say this but there are some people who call themselves Christians, and I have to do all in my power not to stick my tongue out at them! You know what I mean. You know it's hypocrisy. You know it's facade. You know it's the outward and not the inward. As Jeremy Taylor said: 'Men hang out a sign of the devil to prove there is an angel within. They wear sad countenances and look tremendously severe in order to prove that they are holy'. They hang out the sign of the devil to show that there's an angel inside.

These Pharisees used things to speak of abasement they probably anointed their head with ashes, they probably didn't shave or didn't wash, and wore old clothing - and they're using these things to show that they're self-righteous. They're proclaiming their own holiness. We can, as Christians, do exactly the same things today. Let me give you a couple of examples. Years ago people, when they came to church, put on their Sunday best. They did it out of respect for God, didn't they? I believe they did at least. But I think eventually what happened was the quality of the clothes became more important than the reverence toward God. The real motivation, the real reason why they came to church in their Sunday best was overtaken by a competition to look better than others, to dress better than their neighbour. Then our young people come in in jeans and in T-shirts and we tell them off: 'Why are you coming in like this?'. I'll tell you why some of them are coming in like this: because they can see through the facade of competition! Let me declare clearly what I am saying: I still believe that you come to worship God clean, tidy and as best you can. Let me encourage you young people to do that. Don't let the standards drop, but let me ask you this, you people that do come in your Sunday best: our young people may have rejected the clothes contest - have you?

This is deadly. I reject a casual approach to God, and the casual nature of dress in worship, but have we gone to the other extreme? The young people go to the wrong extreme. They throw the baby out with the bath water. They say: 'The Lord only looks on the heart', and the Lord only does look on the heart - but that doesn't mean you can just come to God any way. What about you? Do you come with the outward facade of the Sunday best? What are your motives? Come on!

Take the head-covering for instance, and I want to declare publicly that I believe that 1 Corinthians 11 teaches the head-covering for today in this dispensation. If God spares me, eventually I'll cover it in the ministry of the word of God. One of the reasons for the head-covering - what is it? One of the reasons, as 1

Corinthians 11 teaches us, is to cover the glory of the woman's hair. What do we do? We cover the glory of the woman's hair with the glory of the ten-gallon hat! So people no longer see the glory of our hair but they see the glory of our hat. I think that's why Paul said in 1 Corinthians 11 that it was to be a veil. It's not to be a fashion competition. You see, sometimes I wonder do we miss the point that we can do right things the wrong way! Is that not what this passage teaches? Almsgiving is a right thing. Praying is a right thing. Fasting is a right thing. But are you doing the right thing in the right way? The reason God is saying this - and you might be sitting thinking: 'Oh, he's crossed the line this morning' - let me tell you this: if I've crossed the line this morning, it's because the Lord Jesus crossed the line on the Sermon on the Mount. For pride is abhorrent to God, but the greatest pride that is abhorrent to God is religious pride!

Hypocrisy robs us of reality, and so we substitute reality with our reputation. Reputation instead of character! Mere words instead of true prayer! Money instead of devotion and a heart given over to God! No wonder the Lord compared them to whited tombs and graves and sepulchres that were clean on the outside, and looked well on the outside, but were dead men's bones inside. Not only does hypocrisy rob us of reality, but it robs us - and this is the ultimate thing the Lord is teaching - of rewards. If our lives are done for show, and for the mere praise of men, you can pray and you can give and you can fast - you can pray but there are no answers, you can fast but the inner man shows no improvement, you can give but your heart hasn't been given over any more to God. The reason is: we can be inwardly starving and we have to supplement it by showing off before men. When reputation becomes more important than character, do you know what the Lord says? You have become a hypocrite.

Secondly and finally, if you are inwardly satisfied you fast in secret. If you're inwardly starving you have to show off, but if you're inwardly satisfied you fast in secret. In other words, if you have a heart relationship all you will crave is God's recognition! All you will seek is God's eye! As Oswald Chambers says: 'God calls us to have a relationship between ourselves and God that our dearest friend on earth never would guess'. What about that? Do you have such a relationship with God that the person beside you this morning doesn't even have a clue about it? Because you haven't been boasting about it, what you've done, where you are, how long you pray. The only pretending Christians, the Lord Jesus says, are the ones who pretend they're not fasting when they are fasting. That's the only pretence the Lord's wanting - that you don't come out with ashes on your head, ill-shaven, and all these scraggly clothes, but you come out, wash your face, anoint your head. This isn't literal, it's relative. It's figurative, telling us that we are to act as if we are not doing these things when we are doing them!

What the world should behold on our faces is not glum Christianity, but a bright and a happy exterior. God will observe the sorrowing, sad, mournful, selfless spirit, but we're not meant to parade it around to the world! That's what God sees in secret. Campbell Morgan said: 'Oh my life, thou should keep perpetual lent within the secret chamber of thy being, and everlasting Easter on thy face' - Lent inside but Easter outside! The key to your fasting is your spirit. Oh fast! Please fast! The Lord will only bless you if you fast, but fast in the right way. Pray, please pray! We need more prayer. But don't come to the prayer meeting with the wrong spirit. Don't come before God in the morning without the spirit. Don't give without the spirit of giving in your heart, having already given yourself before God - because what counts is not your performance, convincing to the eyes of an audience of men. It is the hypocrite that craves the spotlight, but it is the true believer in Christ, walking in faith in the Holy Ghost that craves the light of the approval of the eyes of God.

Verse 18 tells us that our motive should be to please God alone. It's hard, you know. It's hard. It's hard to preach this, this morning. Maybe if I wanted to please you I wouldn't have preached it. It's hard to please God rather than men. No matter what men say or what they do, God is saying you've got to cultivate a heart relationship in the secret place where no one else sees. It was well said by a man: 'The most important part of the Christian's life is the part that only God sees'.

How will you fare at the Judgement Seat when the secret things are opened? Your secret prayer life, your secret almsgiving, your secret fasting. Guy King says: 'When a man tells how many hours he's spent in prayer, and talks of his self-denials for the gospel, I sometimes wonder whether his publishing these things robs them of some of their value'. I tell you, that's exactly what the Lord is saying. Publishing these things robs their value.

But like the rest of this Sermon, really what the Lord is getting at is not that we do these things for other people - for men - but we do them for men for self. That's the point. We are spectators of ourselves. We like to see ourselves in the good light, and other people seeing us helps that. Bonhoeffer said: 'It is even more pernicious if I turn myself into a spectator of my own prayer performance. I can lay on a very nice show for myself, even in the privacy of my own room'. Isn't that what we saw in almsgiving? Your left hand's not to know what your right hand's doing. How can that happen? In other words, you're not even to notice it! You're not to take notice of your own performance! What does the word of God say? 'Seekest thou great things for thyself? Seek them not'. In my life, is it Christ and Christ alone?

Some people need to learn that religion is an outward thing. True faith is an outward thing. James said that: 'True religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world'. We, some of us, need to realise that true faith is an outward thing - but what the message of this sermon is, is that true religion is an inward thing. If you have the inward without the outward, or the outward without the inward it is a counterfeit coin! You need the combination of the two sides of the coin, for that coin and that coin alone is the currency in heaven, as well as with God on earth.

Really what this sermon is asking us today is, do you have a balanced Christian life? The question is, does your inward reality reflect your outward portrayal? All I can do is ask you: 'Does it?'.

Our Father, we are suffering from the double-edged sword, for it cuts us. But we thank Thee that it wounds us that it might heal us. We pray Lord that, this morning, we would allow the Holy Spirit to analyse, to search us, to see if there be any wicked way - and we can even have a wicked way in a good thing. Lord, we say today, deliver us from hypocrisy. Deliver us from an outward reputation, when inwardly we're starving. Satisfy us with Thyself we pray, that we will only crave the secret place where God alone can see. Amen.

The Sermon On The Mount - Chapter 16

"Where Is Your Treasure?"

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by Pastor David Legge
Matthew 6:19-24

Now we're turning in our Bibles once again to Matthew's gospel and chapter 6, as we have been doing on recent Lord's Day mornings, studying together the Sermon on the Mount. We read from chapter 6 of Matthew's gospel and verse 19. You remember that our last study was concerning fasting. We have looked already in this chapter at almsgiving - why we ought to give alms and how we ought to do our almsgiving, our good works for God and toward others. Then we looked at prayer - how we ought to pray, and why we pray, and the motivation for prayer. Again in that detailed study of prayer that the Lord was teaching He gives us what we know as the Lord's prayer, but what more correctly could be termed as the Disciples' prayer. Then in our last study we were looking at fasting, and we saw how that teaching of the Lord didn't just apply to fasting but indeed applied to anything with regards to the life in Christ which can become ostentatious very easily. There is a fine line, we have been seeing, between holiness and religious hypocrisy. We are trying, from the teaching and instruction of the Lord, to tread that line very definitely.

So we look at treasures today, and wealth and riches and possessions. Verse 19: "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness! No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon".

Let us pray for a moment. Father, we come again to these sacred words of Thy Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, and we seek to know Him today. We seek to hear Him. We seek to be like Him, because we believe that this whole sermon details for us the life of the Spirit that we live in Christ. We pray our Father that Thou wilt help us to understand. We pray that this mind which was also in Christ Jesus will be in us. We pray that Thou by Thy Spirit will teach us, will lead us and guide us now; that I may be filled with the Holy Ghost of God to preach with power. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

You've often heard it said that money is the root of all evil. Whenever you quote that - and I hope that you picked up the mistake already - many people will retort to you: 'That's a misquotation - it doesn't say that in the Bible. It says love of money is the root of all evil', and that is true. It says 'the love of money', not money itself. Money in itself has no intrinsic moral evil. But our world seems to have turned that statement on its head. It can be capsulated in the statement of George Bernard Shaw, who was not a Christian (far from it), he said: 'The lack of money is the root of all evil', not the love of it. The lack of money - if there was more money in the world people would be happier, and that infers that people would be more righteous.

We must lay down, before we look at this study today: money in itself is not evil. As we go through the words of the Lord Jesus and the writings of the gospel, we find that the Lord Himself commends the good use of money - stewardship and wisdom as we use our money. As we come to these words of the Lord Jesus today, although money in itself is not evil, the Lord is warning us of the grave dangers that are inherent within laying up money, and indeed laying up any treasures, whatever they may be. The Lord is not simply

speaking about money, and by starting off talking about money this morning I don't want to disillusion you at all to what the Lord is speaking about here. I believe He is talking about anything that is to us a strength, anything that is a possession that we prize and that we hold to dearly. It can be money; it can be absolutely anything. It could be a gift that we have, even a spiritual gift. Sometimes within the spiritual life it can be our strengths that are our weaknesses.

You've heard it said, and it is true, it is hard to carry a full cup. It is hard to be a Christian and have something going for you. Whether it be money, whether it be talent, whether it be skill of any kind, it is difficult because those strengths within our lives usually, because of our nature, engender pride within us. It is hard to carry a full cup.

That is why throughout the spiritual walk and pilgrimage that the Holy Spirit would bring all believers through, we must become poor in spirit. The Beatitudes in chapter 5 lays that out to us, and that is why, as you mature in the Christian life, you find that God often strips away from you the great strengths, the great values that you have, and He makes us weak. He makes us weak, He humbles us because then His strength is made perfect in our weakness. We haven't got time to go into all of that today, but what we need to realise at the very outset of what the Lord is saying to us today is to beware of anything - no matter what it might be, it may be an intrinsic good thing or an evil thing - but whatever it is we must beware of anything that causes us to lose sight of our Lord Jesus Christ. If you do that in your Christian life, my friend, you will go far for Jesus. Beware of anything that would cause you to lose sight of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Let's take money for an example, because when we talk about treasures generally money is what comes to our mind first of all. When we look at the Bible, the Bible has many things to say about money - the verse that we have already quoted: 'The love of money is the root of all evil'. We find in Matthew 19 the rich young ruler, you remember that he was very rich. He had kept the commandments from his youth up, and the Lord Jesus told him: 'If you want to inherit eternal life you must sell all your possessions and give it to the poor'. Not that he could inherit eternal life by his works, but Jesus perceived in His all-knowledge, seeing into this young man's heart, that the thing that was his god was his money. The thing that was his treasure was his money. The Bible says that he went away very sad, and we do not know if that young man ever was converted. But using that young man as an illustration, the Lord Jesus turned to His twelve own disciples and He said to them: "Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven. It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God".

Please note what the Lord Jesus was saying. He is not saying it is wrong to be rich. He is saying it is hard to be rich. It is hard to be rich and be a Christian. It is hard to be rich and be spiritual. It is not impossible, but it is hard. Increasingly our world around us is more materialistic than it has ever been. More than ever our church is now more affluent. In the eyes of the world, we in the west are rich. I know it's all relative but if you want to simply compare facts and figures financially, we are rich in comparison to most of the world. Therefore the teaching of Christ is so relevant to us today, but also it becomes increasingly uncomfortable for our generation to grasp and imbibe. Our generation has made the fatal mistake of thinking that it doesn't need God.

Of course, we Christians wouldn't go as far as saying that we don't need God. We are saved by His grace. We are walking, hopefully, according to His commands to a large extent. We may not go as far as to say that we don't need God anymore, but the question that is posed by the Holy Spirit of God to us through these words today is: 'How dependent upon God are we really?'. We may not go as far as to say we have no need of Him, but how much do we really need Him in the everyday humdrum of life? You see we can substitute our strengths for God's provision. We can substitute our strengths even for spirituality in our life. I think to a large extent, within the church of Jesus Christ, education has substituted spirituality. Prestige and status have substituted holiness. There are many things that we could name today and they are standing as an idol in

place of what God would have us be. Degrees are more important than devotion. Intelligence rather than intercession. Sociability rather than spirituality. The church, no matter what strengths she may have, no matter what strengths you have individually as a Christian, the church is not exempt and immune from materialism.

In fact, I would say that materialism has been one of the fatalist factors in exacting from the church of Jesus Christ her zeal that she had last century. The irony of the teaching of the Lord Jesus to us today is this: He seems to be inferring that often those who are good at investing financially are not those who are good at investing spiritually. That is not a generalisation, but simply saying that for many who can invest financially, they have no idea what it is to invest spiritually. Yet the greater irony is this: the fact that the best businessman, the Lord Jesus says, upon the earth, is the one who makes a spiritual investment because it is the only investment that lasts forever. The big question that the Lord is asking, cutting through whether it's money He's talking about, gifts or abilities, the biggest question is this: what are you living for? What world are you living for? Where is your treasure?

How would you answer that today? Where is your treasure? Do you know where your treasure is? Maybe you don't. Maybe you would like to have diagnosed for you today where your treasure is. Well, here is the diagnosis, here is the way you will know, the Lord Jesus says: 'Where your treasure is, there will your heart be'. If you want to know where your treasure is, look for where your heart is today.

Let's analyse these words together. I believe what the Lord is teaching us to do is fourfold. The first thing is this: reinvest your values. Reinvest your values. Look at verse 19: 'Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal'. He's saying: 'Make a lasting investment! Reinvest your values'. You remember the rich farmer, the foolish rich farmer, in Luke chapter 12. It was said of him as he built his barns - after knocking them down because he was doing so well he built them bigger - and he said unto his soul: 'Eat, drink and be merry'. And the Lord said: 'Thou fool, for this night thy soul shall be required of thee; and then whose shall those things be which thou hast provided'. And the Lord Jesus, again using this man as an illustration, says: 'So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God'.

Now, believer today, are you rich toward God? Or do you need to reinvest your values? He says: 'Lay not up for yourselves treasures on earth'. It's literally the same word, 'lay up' is the same word as the next word, 'treasure', that you find. So you could literally read it: 'Treasure not up for yourselves treasures on the earth'. But 'lay up' is a correct translation because it's the sense of putting something away for a rainy day, to amass wealth for yourself, to put a reserve of wealth, to keep in store, to heap up treasures selfishly, just for you and yours.

The word is used positively in the New Testament in 1 Corinthians 16 verse 2 where the church is instructed to: 'Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come'. As we are doing today in our offerings and in our givings, that is to lay aside. But that is doing it positively, we're not doing it for self, we're doing it for the Lord Jesus Christ and the welfare of those in the assembly. But the Lord is saying: 'Do not lay up in that sense for self'. Why not? Why not? Because moth and rust corrupt and thieves break through and steal. 'Corrupt', the Greek word, means 'consume'. It means 'to perish', 'to be destroyed', 'to be used of'. It can literally mean, in this context, 'eating'. We're going to see in the rest of the chapter in the weeks that lie ahead, we're going to see how the Lord talks to us about not to worry about what you'll eat, what you will drink, or what you will wear. He tells us not to worry about those three things. Food and drink are something that will be eaten of, and will go away. The Lord is saying: 'Don't pile up for yourselves and put your values, and put all your heart into things on this earth that will corrupt, that will perish, that will be destroyed'. Ultimately the word is 'that will

vanish'. It's very interesting that in verse 16 it's the same word that is used of the Pharisees, disfiguring their faces to show that they're fasting - they're 'destroying' their faces. The Lord's saying: 'Don't use these treasures. Don't build up these treasures on earth because they will be destroyed; they will be disfigured. They will vanish!'.

Let me give you a biblical illustration. Turn with me to 2 Kings chapter 20 and verse 17. I've told you at times before, but you may not remember, that there is a Greek translation of the Old Testament. The Old Testament is written in Hebrew - remember that - and the New Testament is written in Greek. But there is an Old Testament translation in Greek, for the Greek world to understand the Old Testament. Just as you have to have the Old Testament in English, the Greek world had to have the Old Testament in Greek. So men made a Greek Old Testament and from that we can learn the meaning of some of these words. This word 'laid up' is used in the Greek Old Testament in 2 Kings 20 verse 17. It says: "Behold, the days come, that all that is in thine house, and that which thy fathers have laid up in store unto this day, shall be carried into Babylon: nothing shall be left, saith the LORD" - and there's the word, 'laid up in store'. So you have the children of Israel, and they're in Jerusalem, and as we've been learning in Ezekiel, they're going to be carried out of Jerusalem, out of Palestine, taken to a foreign land. They're going to sit there for 70 years because of their idolatry and because of their sin; and as an illustration of this word, they are being taken up with all their treasures, and their treasures are vanishing, Jerusalem vanishes, the temple drops, and all their wealth is gone. That's why we are not to build up treasures on the earth. Why? Because they will be carried away. They may be carried away in your lifetime. They may be carried away at the grave where you cannot take them with you. Ultimately if they go down your dynasty and your family, one day they will be carried away when this whole world will go up in smoke, and there will be a new heaven and a new earth. But they will vanish one way or another! That's why we are not to build them up.

Again, the overriding message of this sermon is this: the Lord is saying 'If you live for down here you will have nothing up there, but if you choose to lose out down here you will gain up there. For whosoever will save his life will lose it, but whosoever loses his life down here, for My sake', Christ says, 'he will find it'. That means a Christian ought not to be materialistic. You can say what you like, but you cannot interpret these scriptures any other way. A Christian is not to be a 'hoarder' on the earth. A Christian is to be a 'hoarder' in heaven.

God can bless His children, and I have the greatest respect for men who are wealthy and who are spiritual because I think it must be one of the hardest things to do in life. Christians can be blessed with riches, but remember, we must remember their limitations. We must remember that we are not to put our hearts into anything on this earth apart from our Lord Jesus Christ, whether it's financial or other strengths that we may have. Money can buy a bed, but it can't buy you sleep. It can buy you books, but it can't buy you brains. It can buy food, but it cannot buy an appetite. It can buy dress, but it cannot buy beauty. It can buy a house, but not a home; medicine, but not health; pleasure, but not peace; amusements, but not joy. It can buy a crucifix, but it cannot buy a Saviour. It can buy a church building, but it cannot buy the presence of God. Just remember its limitations!

I think these verses were put well by Martha S. Nicholson in her poem concerning the Christian's attitude toward the things of this world. Listen to her words:

'Let me hold lightly the things of this earth.
Transient treasures, what are they worth?
Moths can corrupt them, rust can decay,
All their bright beauty fades in a day.

Let me hold lightly temporal things,
I who am deathless, I who wear wings.
Let me hold fast, Lord, things of the skies,
Quicken my vision, open my eyes.

Show me Thy riches, glory and grace,
Boundless as time is, endless as space.
Let me hold lightly things that are mine
Lord, Thou dost give me all that is Thine'.

That's what the Christian attitude is meant to be to the world, and to the things of this world, and to money, and to materials, and even to gifts, even to our strengths. It is: 'Let me hold lightly the things of this earth'.

If you want an excellent example of that you have one in a young man of 22 years of age by the name of Jim Elliott. He went with his young wife, not long married, to the Auca Indians to tell those cannibals of the gospel and the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. On their first ever meeting with those Auca Indians, Jim Elliott, at 22 years of age, kissed his young wife goodbye and went to meet them, and he never came back. Martyred for God! Twenty-two, dead for Christ! Do you know what he wrote in his diary? Listen to this: 'One of the great blessings of heaven is the appreciation of heaven on earth. He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose'.

No doubt you know where his treasure was. Where's yours? It may be that you need to reinvest your values. The second thing the Lord says is: you may need to relocate your heart. He says, if you look at verse 21: "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also". You need to relocate your heart, perhaps. That means first of all you need to locate it, you need to find out where it is - where is your heart? What are you living for? What's all your time and energies and strengths put into? I know we're talking to an age where this is very difficult, where many men and women have to work hard. I used to be told when I was at school: 'David, work as hard as you can and then when you grow up you'll not have to work as hard as I did when I grew up. I am working that way because I didn't work at school' - but it's not like that anymore. The harder you work at school, the harder you work afterwards, whether it's in a profession, or a business or whatever.

But my friend, work is important, and we must provide for our families. We must provide for one another. But where is our heart? Have you located it? Could it be that you might need to relocate it? Could it be that you need a spiritual heart transplant? I know that people think that all this talk of sacrificial spiritual living sounds like torture. 'There he goes again. It's like pulling teeth coming on a Sunday morning. This Sermon on the Mount's awful, you know. We've to listen to all this criticism' - remember it's the Lord's Sermon, by the way. But it's not torture, this is what you are misunderstanding. The apostle preached, in the book of Acts: 'all the words of this life' - for this is life, it's not torture!

Let me tell you what torture is. Torture is having your heart in things that will corrupt and pass away. That's torture! My friend, if you want to get rest you're not going to get it by putting your trust and faith in things that will pass away, and things that you can lose. There's an excellent story that was told about a preacher who had a little dog, and he gave the dog a bone. And he said that that dog enjoyed playing with that bone every day until the dog one day went out into the garden, dug a hole in the garden, in the earth, and buried the bone. And ever since that day, the preacher said, the dog was sitting at the rear window of the house, and he was watching that spot where he buried the bone. Even if a little sparrow landed on the spot, he went berserk! Barking! He said: 'From the day he buried his bone in the earth he didn't have any peace'.

His yoke is easy and His burden is light. My friend, there is a rest unto the people of God, and do you know what that is? One of the things that it is, is to be divorced from the world, to be cut off. To not have a care is

not to win the lottery; it is to be trusting in God. That's to not have a care! That's to have your future secured! It may be that we need to relocate our heart. Where is your heart? Is it buried in the earth? With every fear, and with every anxiety, and with everything that comes across your path, are you afraid that your foundations are going to be rocked because you've built them on the earth, and not in Christ?

I love reading missionary biographies. I haven't told my wife this, but I'd love to be a missionary! I might take her with me! People think that the pastor or the preacher is the general of the Christian church. I don't think that (and I know that most of you probably don't either), but the missionary, the true God-given missionary is the SAS of the church. David Livingstone was one of those first pioneer missionaries. I've a few books to read at the moment but as soon as I get through them I'm going to read this man's life story. He said this - listen to this please: 'I will place no value on anything that I possess, except in relation to the Kingdom of Christ. If anything will advance the interests of that Kingdom it shall be given away or kept. Only as by the giving or by the keeping of it shall most promote the glory of Him to whom I owe all my hopes in time and eternity'.

I'll give anything away. I'll keep anything. But the reason why I'll do it is for the glory of Christ, and for the extension of His Kingdom'. Where's your heart? Is your heart like his? 'Och, but you said he was the SAS'. My friend, the church is meant to be the SAS of humanity. The church is meant to be the pinnacle of what God had envisaged and planned for all eternity - "a peculiar people, zealous of good works, a holy people and nation". What this is is simply the same spirit that was in Paul the apostle, which is the Spirit of our Lord Jesus Christ. "Yea doubtless, I count all things but loss" - everything loss - "for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them dung that I might win Christ and be found in Him. Not having my own righteousness which is of the law but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith; that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto Him".

Let me tell you something more about David Livingstone. He laboured all his life in Africa and he died on his knees in prayer, but did you know that his heart is buried in Africa? I'm not speaking metaphorically. His literal heart, the thing that pumped blood around his body, lies in Africa. Of course, everybody thought he was mad at home. In London they thought he had lost his marbles. That's usually what happens when a man gets too spiritual - the church thinks he's gone crazy. But then when he died he became a superstar. They wanted to bring his body from Africa back to London and they wanted to bury it in Westminster Abbey. If you go to London today to Westminster Abbey you will see, right at the very forefront of the altar, pride of place in the whole of that church, is the body of David Livingstone.

When the Africans heard that they wanted to take the body to London there was an uproar. They said: 'David Livingstone would have wanted to be buried here in Africa because his heart was in Africa'. But the English insisted: 'He's our man and we're going to take him home'. They came over to Africa to take the body away, but the night before they were going to ship that coffin away, the Africans broke into the hold and they opened up that coffin, and they took a dagger and they stuck it in his chest and they cut out his heart, and they planted it underneath a tree. And there's a little village in Africa you can go to today with a sign on it that says this: "At the bottom of this tree lies the heart of David Livingstone". His body might be in Westminster Abbey but his heart was in Africa.

Where is your heart? Oh my friend, "if ye then be risen with Christ seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things of the earth for ye are dead and your life is hid with Christ in God". What world are you living for? People say this: 'See him, he's too heavenly minded for any earthly good'. I have not yet once, neither looking in the mirror, found one man that is too heavenly minded for any earthly good, and I think God could do with one today.

Do you need to relocate your heart? Thirdly, do you need to refocus your vision? Verse 22, the Lord Jesus says: "The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light". The light of the body, literally in Greek that word is lamp - the lamp of the body, the way you see. If the eye is single, the Lord is saying (that word 'single' means 'sound'), if you've got good vision as opposed to a diseased eye, in other words if you've got good eyesight it'll help you. Here's the question: what are you focussing on? What is your focus in life? Are you focussed on two different things?

You know that you've two eyes - I hope everyone has two eyes, and if I've offended anyone with only one eye I apologise. You've two eyes but they have to look at the one thing, don't they? If they don't look at the one thing you'll walk into something. James says that a double minded - we could translate it in this context, a double sighted man is unstable in all his ways. Why do some people get nowhere in a Christian life? Why are some saved and stuck and never go on and mature? I'll tell you why: because they've got bad eyesight! They are focussing on heaven and earth at the same time, and if you focus on heaven and earth at the same time you'll get cross-eyed, and you'll never get anywhere. You need to focus either on earth, and if you focus on earth you're not a Christian. Or you need to focus on heaven, my friend, but you can't focus on both! You could be a man with no vision here today, and I fear sadly that there are some men and women today, and they've no vision for Christ. Or you could be a man with double vision. In other words, you're pulled between the two opinions - heaven and earth. You don't know what to live for, and you're secular five days a week and you're Christian two days. Jesus says you need to have single vision. You need to have single vision, my friend. Listen: what the world needs today, and what the Iron Hall needs more than it ever has is 'heart Christianity'. Heart Christianity!

C.B. Fry, years ago, was coaching schoolboys in the art of the sport of football, and he told them that the surest way to score a goal was to throw your heart in the net. If you throw your heart in the net the ball's sure to follow. Have you thrown your heart in? It's great to see you at meetings. It's great to see you praying and hear you speaking, but have you thrown your heart in? It may be that you need to reinvest your values, relocate your heart, refocus your vision, and finally reinstate your Lord.

A man cannot serve two masters. You see that word 'master' in Greek - it's the word 'hurios' (sp?), which means 'Lord'. You cannot serve two lords. A wee girl once said to her daddy: 'Daddy, why can't a man have more than one wife? Where in the Bible does it say that it's not right?'. After some thought he said: 'No man can serve two masters!' Friends, none of us can serve two masters. What you live for will determine who your Lord is. Who is your Lord? You say: 'Surely for a Christian their Lord is Jesus, the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ'. But is it? Is He your Lord? Is He the driving force in your life? Is He the motivation for everything? For I fear that He is not, and that is why the church is lukewarm today. You cannot serve the world and serve God. You cannot serve yourself and your pocket, and serve God. You cannot serve your gift and your prestige, and serve God. You cannot serve God and mammon. People would translate that word 'mammon' a different way like 'money', and I don't agree with that because mammon is the personification of all wealth and avarice, and all that you can have materialistically. It means this: there's a person here called mammon, or there's a person here called God - who are you going to serve?

Aesop speaks in one of his fables about a time when the beasts and the fowls were engaged in warfare. The bat (if you've ever seen a bat, it's sort of a cross between a bird and an animal) tried to belong to both parties. When the birds were victorious the bat was strutting and winging it about saying to everybody that he was a bird. Then when the beasts won he was walking about saying to everybody, 'I'm a beast'. But eventually his hypocrisy was discovered and he was rejected by both the beasts and the birds. Aesop says that the bat had to hide himself and only come out at night.

The Lord says you cannot - that word means you are not able - the Christian is not able to serve God and anybody else. Christ and religion it cannot be, Christ and Pharasaism, Christ and show business, Christ and

commercial business, Christ and denomination, Christ and theology, Christ and science, Christ and career, Christ and family. It can't be Christ and everything! It must be Christ alone! All men have their price for selling out the Lord, for Judas it was 30 pieces of silver, for many of us it can be almost anything.

Nearly all of spirituality in the New Testament comes down to one thing my friends, and it's this: the Lordship of Jesus Christ. He is Lord by right, but can I ask you: is He your Lord in reality? Is He Lord of all?

Our Father, as we focus on our Author and Finisher of our faith, we can read:

'In life no house, no home,
My Lord on earth might have.
In death no friendly tomb,
But what a stranger gave.
What may I say?
Heaven was His home
But mine the tomb,
Wherein He lay'.

Father, we are commanded to be dead to this world and alive to God. We are commanded to have our heart in heaven where moth and rust doth not corrupt, nor thieves break in and steal. Father, help us, help us to break the moorings of this world's harbour and live on that higher plane. Let us be heavenly Christians on the earth. Lord, help us to reinvest our values if need be. Help us to relocate our heart, to refocus our vision and to reinstate our Lord. Just now we bow our heads and we confess that He is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Amen.

The Sermon On The Mount - Chapter 17

"Don't Worry"

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by Pastor David Legge
Matthew 6:25-34

Now we're turning again this morning to Matthew's gospel chapter 6, and we have been going through studies now for some time in the Sermon on the Mount. We're on study number 17, and God willing we may finish the chapter today. We're looking at the subject 'Don't Worry'. Now, I have quite a heavy cold and I hope to get through this OK - maybe Lawrence will bail me out if I don't get through it all, but please do bear with the coughs and splutters throughout the sermon, and hopefully the Lord will have something to say to your heart.

Verse 25, we'll read verse 24: "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon. Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof".

I doubt whether or not you have ever seen a gravestone with the epitaph 'Died from worry' on it, but the fact of the matter is it could be written on many of the gravestones that we have in our land and in our world. Doctors never cease to tell us today that many of the illnesses that we have with us are directly, not just the symptom, but are directly related to the problem of anxiety, the problem of fear and the problem of worry. Now we're all guilty of this sin. Indeed, most of us worry sometimes, some of us worry a lot of the time, and there's a small elite group of worriers who worry all the time. There is even a group of people who worry so much that when they run out of something to worry about they worry about that! They have in their mind a reserve list of things to worry about, and if on occasion during the day they find that they're not worrying, they're not chewing something over, there's not something gnawing at their soul, they will just recall from their subconscious this list of things to worry about, and start from the top and go down them all.

I'm sure that all of you find yourself in one of those categories today. The thing that we realise and face day-by-day in our world is that worry, stress, and nervous anxiety perhaps could be labelled 'public enemy number one'. Believers in the Lord Jesus Christ are not immune from this problem. We've been looking in recent weeks at how the Sermon on the Mount is given to the Lord's children, to His disciples, to Christians. In that light, therefore, we must take the exhortation of the Lord and realise that we can be prone to worry. The National Anxiety Centre in Maplewood, New Jersey in the United States gives a list of the top ten anxieties from the 1990s. Number one was AIDS; number two drug abuse; number three nuclear waste; number four the ozone layer, five famine; six homelessness; seven the national economic deficit; eight air pollution; nine water pollution; and ten rubbish.

If you go down all ten of those top ten things to worry about in our world, you will find that all of them can generally and broadly be categorised under the Lord's definition of the things that humanity generally worries about. Eating, drinking, and putting on. They're worried about their life, they're worried about things that will encroach upon their life - whether it be illness to snatch away their life, or whether it be simply their welfare, looking after themselves by putting things upon them. The Lord in verse 25, after our study last week on treasures, building up your treasures in heaven, the Lord comes as a parentheses in verse 25 and says: 'Therefore, if you are laying up treasures in heaven, as I have taught you to do, and not on earth - if your heart is in heaven and not on earth; if you're living for heaven and not the earth; if you're single-sighted and not double-minded and unstable in all your ways; if you're only serving one Lord, the Lord Jesus Christ, and not the personification of avarice and greed and materialism which is mammon - if you are doing this you will have no need to worry'.

We tend to think of worry as a small thing, a weakness in our character, a slight personality defect that we cannot help. You often hear people say: 'Ach, I'm a real worrier, but that's just me, that's just the way I am'. Friends, we need to realise that in the context of where we find worry, the subject and the theme, in the Sermon on the Mount would lead us to believe that worry can be the beginning of serving mammon. Worry can be the seed of following another god that is giving the Almighty God competition. You may think that to serve mammon is just to be rich, perhaps you think that a successful businessman is in danger of serving mammon - but the fact is, the Lord is saying it can start from this anxiousness over the smallest things in our life, basic things like eating and drinking and what we're going to put on. That's the first thing, and probably the most fundamental thing, that I want to leave with you today: our Lord is teaching us the wickedness of worry.

Now, of course it's unnatural for us not to be concerned about these things. You might say: 'Well, who doesn't worry?', that's like saying 'Who isn't a sinner?'. But the fact of the matter is, these basic things in life, we do worry about them: eating and drinking and what we will put on - and the reason is there's a demand for these things in life. If you look at verse 26 you will see that the Lord puts them down in order of importance. He starts off with eating, we need to eat to live. He talks about drinking, we need to drink to keep body and soul together. Then He goes down, and of less importance there is clothing. The Lord is saying: 'Life needs these things', and you and I both know that, but yet the Lord comes in with this conclusion - and this is the crux of the matter - is the life not more than food, is the life not more than drink, is the life not more than clothes?

The Greek word for 'life' here is the very word 'soul'. Out of the soul, our personality, our intellect, our emotion, our volition, our will, comes that desire. We know we need to eat, we have an appetite to eat, so we go and eat. It's the same with drinking, it's the same with keeping ourselves warm and protected with clothing. Yet the Lord says that out of what may be an innocent human appetite, and basic demand and need, you can worship another god! Sin can come out of the most basic things in our life. Now listen to me today: worry is not weakness, worry is wickedness! Why is it? Turn with me to Psalm 78 for a moment, this Psalm is the historical trail of the Israelite's pilgrimage through the wilderness and indeed their many sins against God. It's a little cameo of their whole history, and we break into verse 19 in the wilderness - and remember that they were being fed from heaven by the manna, but yet: "They spake against God; they said, Can God furnish a table in the wilderness?", verse 20, "Behold, he smote the rock, that the waters gushed out, and the streams overflowed; can he give bread also? Can he provide flesh for his people?".

Whenever we say, as the children of God, 'Can God? Will God? Is God able?', that is unbelief! My friend, worry - worry - is unbelief. 'Can God do this for me? Can God get me out of this situation?' - anyone who worries, myself included, reveals within himself his own unbelief in God. Remember that this whole Sermon on the Mount is specifically dealing with the theme of hypocrisy, religious ostentation and hypocrisy. Here

the Lord is coming, He's dealt with almsgiving, He's dealt with prayer, He's dealt with fasting, He's talked about the Pharisees and what they're like - white on the outside, and dead men's bones on the inside - and now, don't think He's left the subject of hypocrisy, He's coming again and He is telling us: 'For you to be a child of God, for you to be a believer and to worry, is to be a hypocrite'. Do you get it? Worry is hypocrisy.

Think about it: how can a Christian have faith in God and then worry? How can he mark himself as one who believes and is trusting, justified by faith, but also the just shall live by faith, and then turn around and worry: 'Can God?'. It is a burden to worry simply because it is a burden living without faith in God. Child of God, if you're burdened with worry today it's because you're burdened with a lack of faith. God says to you worriers: 'Take no thought'. When we look at the original language that Greek word appears six times within this passage. Other translations translate it: 'Do not be anxious', 'Do not worry', but literally it means this: to be drawn in different directions - do not be drawn in different directions! Why? Because worry is something that pulls you apart from the inside out, and theoretically it is what pulls you between God's camp and mammon's camp.

'It's alright for you David, you don't know what I'm going through, you don't have the worries that I have, you don't have the concerns that I'm bearing at this moment'. I know it's difficult to accept these words and teaching from one who is experiencing little hardship in his life and problems at this time, but please - as I have exhorted you right throughout these studies - remember who's speaking here, it's not David Legge, it is the Lord Jesus Christ your Saviour, the One whom Isaiah called the Man of Sorrows and acquainted with grief. I want to bring you right to the Mount now, I want you to hear these tender words from the loving Lord Jesus, I want you to see the honey dripping from His loving lips as He says to these people: 'Put worry away from you! Don't let it tear you apart any more'. This is One who knows what He's talking about from experience.

F. B. Meyer puts it beautifully when he says of our Lord: 'He never forgot that He was the child of the labouring classes, that His mother at His birth had brought the gift of the poor to the temple, and that from boyhood He had been accustomed to the shifts of poverty. His frequent speech about patching garments and using old bottle skins, about the price of sparrows and the scanty pittance of a labourer's life, indicate that His mind was habituated to the experience of the poor'. Your Lord's mind was habituated to the experience of the poor, and it is that suffering Saviour who says to you today: 'Look up! Take no thought, look up!'.

Look up to what? Well, of course we look up to God. But the Lord says, 'As you're looking up to God take a little note of the things that are on the way up'. He gives us three wonderful illustrations from nature. I don't know whether you've ever noticed throughout the Gospels that most of our Lord's illustrations come from nature, because in nature you have the plan and the sovereign purpose of God created for us. We can see God's intention for life. We often, when we're illustrating things, use materialism and mechanics - we talk about a car, and a helicopter, and a plane, and all sorts of things that we have made. But when the Lord Jesus is illustrating things He talks of things that God has made, not imitations - because whenever you go into an imitation that man has made and look at it with a microscope, you can see that it's clumsy, it's big, it's bulky, and it's ugly, and it's only from a distance that you can see any imitation and beauty. But when you narrow into God's creation, and when you look into the depths, you can see the intricacy of God's plan and God's purpose.

In the very week of creation we can tell that God has supplied absolutely everything for you. Never forget, my friend, that for five days God created the earth, and then on the sixth day He created man. Five days before He created man He's preparing everything that man needs before He makes man. The way we live our lives you would think that He created man on the first day, and then He spent the other four days supplying his need - no! God supplies our need first, and then He creates us.

He says first of all, look at verse 26: "Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?". Look at the birds! They've no need to hoard, they've no need to store, they're not worrying about the future and piling things up for their supply and their providence in the days that lie ahead. Now let me tell you this: He's not advocating a carefree irresponsible attitude to work. You can't use this as a text and say: 'Well, the sparrows don't work, so I'm not going to work'. Paul says: 'If any will not work, neither should he eat'. What God is saying to us here today is, when we do work and when we obey the command of God to work, God will provide for us. Look at the birds, they don't even work, yet God provides for them - are you not much better than they?

Let's think about this. Have you ever looked out of the window in the Iron Hall and seen, on the telephone wire, a sparrow with its feathers falling out because it's worrying that much? I've never seen one. Have you ever seen one sitting in a nest depressed about where the next worm is going to come from to feed it's little ones? As you look at creation, and you look at the parables that the Lord Jesus uses and His illustrations, I wonder sometimes the more I read it and study it: is the wildlife round about us more aware of God than we are at times? If you get up early in the morning before the sun has risen, what a Bible lesson there is there for anyone! Do you know what I'm talking about? The song, the dawn chorus, that doxology of praise, the first thing you hear in the morning are those birds singing - I wonder what they're singing, but I have a suspicion they're singing: 'Great is Thy faithfulness, oh God my Father, Thy mercies are new every morning!', they don't worry!

The Lord never said: 'Oh ye of little faith' to a sparrow. It's amazing to think that the Lord Jesus is directing us today, and He is telling men, to be like birds. 'Men, be like birds, for know ye not that ye are of more value than these sparrows?'. What a Bible lesson! Be like a bird! What a theologian - forget about A.W. Pink, or Tozer, or any of these, Matthew Henry, the puritans and everything. Here's a theologian for you: a bird! A bird, a prince of preachers of a bird. We need more bird brains like this, we need people who will have faith in God like a little bird.

Said the robin to the sparrow:
I really do not know
Why it is these human beings
Rush about and worry so.

Said the sparrow to the robin:
I think that it must be
That they have no heavenly Father,
Such as cares for you and me'.

Look to the birds. Then He says: 'Look at your height'. Verse 27: "Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?". The Greek literally could read: 'You can't add one more year unto your lifespan'. Whether it's your height or whether it's your life, you can't do anything about it. A woman for 40 years worried that she was going to die of cancer, and at the age of 70 she died of pneumonia - she wasted 40 years of her life worrying about the wrong thing. Oh, how often we do this. What we're doing is, we try to take the responsibilities that are God's out of His hands and put them in our hands. We want to control them, but we can't control them. It is in our worry that we're saying: 'I can't handle this' - well then why are you trying to handle it? 'I can't cope with this, how am I ever going to get out of this? I can't change this' - if you can't change it, why are you worrying about how you're going to change it?

That's a big question, isn't it? If we know it's foolish to worry and be anxious, why do we do it at all? I'll tell you why we do it: because we're that used, as old sinners, with being independent of God that even with the

grace of God in our life we find it hard to utterly rely upon Him. My friend, He says: 'Your heavenly Father will care for you'. God is there, why do you need to worry? What good is worry doing when God is there? More than that: if God wasn't there worrying wouldn't make any difference either! For it does nothing, worry only changes things for the bad, makes things look worse - but trusting God makes things better!

Look to the birds, look to your height, look to your life - then thirdly He says: 'Look at the lilies'. Verses 28 to 30, look at them: "Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not", that's a man's work, "neither do they spin", that's a woman's work, "Yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?". Consider the lily, the lily is rare, the lily is precious, the lily is colourful, even Solomon in all his glory - and remember that the Queen of Sheba came to see Solomon's glory, the pageantry of Solomon's kingdom and the glory of his gold was world renowned, and she said to the King: 'It was a true report which I heard in mine own land of thine acts and of thy wisdom. Howbeit I believed not their words until I came and mine eyes have seen it, and behold the one half of the greatness of thy wisdom was not told me, for thou excellest the fame that I heard'. You're clothed greater than that!

Do you believe that? Even the grass of the field, He says, that's worth nothing - it's the stuff that fuel is made out of, it's fired into the oven, it's here today gone tomorrow - God even clothes it for its short lifespan, how much more is He going to clothe you, O you of little faith? Now look, the Lord Jesus is using an argument here of reason that you find right throughout the New Testament. It's called the 'fortiori argument'. What it means is this: it is an argument in the form of 'if this, then how much more that?' - if this, then how much more that? If I look after the birds, then how much more will I look after you? If I look after your height, then how much more will I look after your life? If I look after the lilies, how much more will I look after your clothing? Perhaps the most famous of this fortiori argument is found in Romans 8 and verse 32: "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?". If He gave His Son, do you not think He'll give what you need? If then, then how much more that?

We find it in the Sermon on the Mount, and we'll come to it in chapter 7 verse 11, speaking of praying for the Holy Spirit: "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?". If you're an old sinner, and you can give a lollipop to your child; how much more shall God give you the Holy Spirit? Fretting child of God, wait till I tell you - this might be simplistic to you, but God has no room for you in His life if it's too simplistic for you - for the saints of God, since our Lord Jesus Christ taught this at the Sermon on the Mount, have been living on these three illustrations through all the turmoil and hell that life has thrown at them - they have stood upon the rock of God's word! The saints of God have tried and proved this: George Mueller based his whole life of trusting God on these two great promises concerning birds and lilies!

Could the Lord accuse us today and say: 'O ye of little faith'? Remember that was the Lord's recurring rebuke to His disciples. They were in the boat, and oh they were so praiseworthy of the Lord Jesus, but then the storm came and their boat was rocked and they were nearly thrown out into the depths of the ocean, and as far as they were concerned the Lord Jesus Christ couldn't care less if they perished or not - they were going to drown and He could have stopped it! What did the Lord say: 'O ye of little faith!'. He was going to feed 5000 people, and they doubted the Lord's ability to serve food for them, and the Lord Jesus said: 'Why reason ye among yourselves?'. Do you know what one of the greatest problems to faith is in a believer? Reason! Why reason ye? You mightn't be able to work it out, but God's ways are not your ways, His thoughts are not your thoughts - O ye of little faith!

Peter got out of the boat, which most of us wouldn't even do. He's walking on the water, but he takes his eyes off the Lord and he begins to fall - and that can happen to us. Whether it's the storm, whether we don't know

who's going to feed us and we reason that God cannot do it, or whether we're sinking into life's depths and oceans - O ye of little faith, look to the birds, look to your height, look to the lilies, and trust God! The disciples came to Him in Matthew 17 and said: 'Lord, we've tried casting these demons out, but they'll not go'. The Lord said: 'They won't go because of your unbelief'.

My friend, that's the wickedness of worry, but there is the worldliness of worry. The Lord doesn't just use these three illustrations, He says: "After these things do the Gentiles, the nations, seek". You only need to look around you today and see how, in a materialistic world, this is what people are worrying about. The economy, recession, possessions, career, profession - it is worldliness today, and the Bible teaches us that in the last days this will be a characteristic mark of men and women. In other words, listen now: all that the sinner without Christ lives for is to eat, to drink, and to be merry! Are we different? Paul said: 'What does it advantage me if the dead rise not?' - he's saying: 'If there's no resurrection, and this Lord Jesus Christ is a farce and a myth and a liar and a cheat, what does it advantage me? Eat, drink, and be merry - you might as well, because there's no God!'.

In Matthew 24 the Lord said that as it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of man - and He marks it by this characteristic: men were eating, men were drinking, men were marrying and giving in marriage until the day that Noah entered into the ark. Now, have we that attitude? My friend, you're going through the turmoil and the trial of life, you don't know where the next loaf of bread perhaps is coming from, you've got illness and sickness on your mind, trouble and bereavement - but, my friend, have faith in God, for God is there and God is true, and God will deliver! We betray His existence when we worry, we give a bad testimony when we worry, when we adopt the attitude of the world: "For your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things".

God will supply your needs, there's no sense in worrying about tomorrow, as He says in verse 34, for tomorrow won't change. Worrying about tomorrow does nothing for today, in fact if anything it doesn't do anything for tomorrow, it doesn't do anything for today only destroy today. You've maybe heard of Corrie Ten Boom, she spent years in a Nazi concentration camp and helped many Jewish people. She was a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, and she went through more heartache and trial and tribulation than you and I perhaps all put together will know in our lifetime. Do you know what she said a few years before she died? 'Worry does not empty tomorrow of sorrows, it empties today of strength'.

Imagine what could be done for God if you put all the energy that you use worrying into His service. Imagine if you turned your worrying into prayer, into fasting, into witnessing. Is there a way out? Praise God there's a way out of worrying - verse 30: "Ye of little faith", you need faith. Verse 32, you need your heavenly Father, for He knows; you need to look to the heavenly Father in faith. Verse 33, seek first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness, then all these other things that you're worrying about will be sorted out. That righteousness is not imputed righteousness that the boys and girls were hearing about this morning, because you don't seek after that - it's given to you in one justifying act of faith. What this is, is chapter 6 and verse 1, the almsgiving, the works of righteousness; it is chapter 5: 'Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees'. Seek that godliness, that holiness, that life of Christ in you by the Spirit - and the word 'seek' is the present imperative which means this: an unceasing quest, seek it and God will supply your need!

This is God's Social Security plan: seek first the kingdom of God. What do human beings do: 'I must eat, I must drink, I must have clothes to put on and shoes to put on the children's feet. I must, I must have this, and this, and this, and this' - but God says if you want those things, if you need those things, you must decide: 'I must have a relationship with God, I must have faith, I must be more godly, I must be more holy'. You've got to reverse the whole natural order, and first and foremost be rightly related to Him. Why? Why? Here we come back again to the whole theme of this Sermon: you cannot produce an inner life with God if you are

continuously focusing on your outward life. Whether it's in prayer, fasting, almsgiving - it doesn't matter, even in providing food, drink and clothing - if you're continually focusing on the outward you will never produce an inward relationship. But, my friend, if you seek first the kingdom of God, all these other things God will sort out for you. I'm not saying you'll be rolling in money, but God will supply your need. Bishop Castles, one of the Cambridge seven, when he was going to the mission field as a pioneer - he had on all his luggage two words: 'God first!'.

How can you have no worries? Put God first. A wee girl was trying to dress up in her Mummy's gloves. She had one of those big leather ones up to her elbow with all the buttons, and she was getting more and more frustrated - she couldn't get them all in the right place. She got so annoyed that she shouted out: 'Mummy, they won't come right!'. Then her Mummy explained: 'There's the first button, and then there's the first hole. Get the first one right and all the rest will follow easily'. My friend: seek first, make you His service your delight, and your wants shall be His cares. Where is your heart? Is it in heaven, or is it on earth. My friend, listen to the words of the Lord: 'Don't worry, your heavenly Father knows what you need'.

Let's bow our heads, and it may be the case that there's someone here who is not saved and has never been converted by the grace of God. My friend, this message applies to you in a sense too: God loves you enough to send His only begotten Son to die for you, He has provided for you too - salvation - but what you need is faith. You must take that gift, be saved today, and there need be no more worry about sin, about guilt, about punishment, about even provision and God looking after you. You have many problems, perhaps, but there need be no more worries. Believer, I am prone to worry, and it must be tackled - it is the devil's ground in our lives at times that robs us of blessing - be done with it now, put it away under the blood and be free of worry today, and go home with your heart in heaven and your trust in God.

Father, we thank Thee for the Lord Jesus, for His precious words, and we pray for grace to implement them. We pray that sorrowing and sad and downcast hearts in this building now will ask themselves: 'Why art thou downcast, O my soul? Hope thou in God, for thou shalt yet praise Him'. Give faith, we pray, to believe, and help our unbelief. For Christ's sake, Amen.

The Sermon On The Mount - Chapter 18

"Misjudgement"

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by Pastor David Legge
Matthew 7:1-6

Now we're turning again to Matthew's gospel, this time chapter 7. You will remember, I hope, that the Sermon on the Mount of our Lord Jesus Christ spans over three chapters of Matthew's gospel: chapter 5, chapter 6 and chapter 7. We're now in our eighteenth study, we are now entering into the first few verses of chapter 7 of Matthew.

Reading from verse 1, our Lord Jesus - and please do remember always, right throughout this sermon, that these are the words of the Lord Jesus Christ. What I seek to do, as a preacher of the word of God, is just to extract out of these words the meaning that the Lord Jesus Christ had in His preaching, inspired by the Spirit of God. We seek to know what Christ would tell us today: "Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye. Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you".

Let us pray: Our Father, we have come once again to Thy holy word. We know that all scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable but, our Father, these specifically are the words of Thy Son. We remember that from the excellent glory there were those words at the Mount of the Transfiguration: 'This is My beloved Son, hear ye Him'. Oh our Father, give us today hearts of meekness and humility to receive the engrafted word of God. Let us not transgress these principles by applying these words to other people; to our brothers and sisters in Christ that we can perhaps see in our gathering today; to members of our family, friends, loved ones. But Father, help us to ask ourselves: 'Do these words apply to me?'. Father, give us grace and humility to bow before Thy word and to obey. For we know that to trust and obey is the only way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey. Help me I pray, our Father. Fill me and anoint me to preach to the glory of Christ. Amen.

A typical Ulster family were driving home from church on a Lord's Day just like this. They were all together in the car. Father began to moan about the length of the preacher's sermon and about how boring it was. Then mother began to complain about how the organist, in the second line of the third hymn, was playing too loud. Then little sister, who is studying music at school, piped up that the soloist was flat in the third verse of her solo. Then granny began to complain that she couldn't see the preacher, and she couldn't hear what he was saying (needless to say she was sitting in the back row of the church). Then little Willy was hearing all that was going on in the background of the car, and he began to fuss about the woman who was sitting in front of him with the big hat, and he couldn't see anything that was going on. But just after a few moments' complaining, he nudged his dad in the ribs and said: 'But Dad, you've got to admit, it was a good show for 50p!'.

It'll take a minute for the penny to drop, but that was the offering that the family gave. We have a tendency in life, as believers, as human beings, to see the fault in everyone else and fail to see the faults in our own lives. In fact, perhaps as believers, as children of God, we have an acute sense of right and wrong. But in this sermon we have been learning, week after week, especially in chapters 6 and 7, how righteous acts that are

seen in God's sight as very commendable can slowly slump into something that is ostentatious and hypocritical. We looked at fasting. We looked at almsgiving. We looked at praying. We are now coming today to look at judgement. We can see how we who have been regenerated by the Spirit of God, we who have been made alive from dead works of unrighteousness and sin, can now discern somewhat what is wrong and what is right. But that gift of God's Holy Spirit can very easily fall into the danger of misjudgement. That is what I want to speak to you about today, and that is what the Lord Jesus is speaking of in these verses.

It is characteristic of human beings that many of us judge others and we miss ourselves. The old adage is well worn, and has been said many times but it is very true, that when you point the finger at others there are four pointing back. We hear it over and over again, but how true it is. We Christians tend to be experts at sorting everyone else out but ourselves.

There was once a cartoon character who was the dominant aggressive type, and he is philosophising alongside his friend who happens to be the opposite in character to him - he's quite quiet and passive. With unhesitating boldness, the stronger dominant one says to the weaker one: 'If I were in charge of the world, I would change everything'. A bit intimidated, the friend who is forced to listen says rather meekly: 'Uh, th-th-that wouldn't be easy. I mean, wh-where would you start?'. The dominant character turned right away to his friend, looked at him directly and said: 'I would start with you!'.

Friends, we laugh at these stories but we can be so like Job's friends: 'Wisdom will die with us'. We feel that perhaps we have the right, or even the ability, to sort everyone else's life out with the exception of our own. I think it is very characteristic perhaps of Ulster Christians, who pride themselves in their ability to critique others. We think to ourselves: 'There's nowhere in the world quite like Ulster. There's nowhere in the world quite like the church and believers here in Northern Ireland', or even, 'In me - no one is quite like me'. But the fact of the matter is: any fool can criticise, can condemn and can complain - and usually they do!

Doug Barnett (sp?) said these very wise words, listen to them carefully: 'Christians would never dream of intentionally running down other people with their cars. Then why do they do it with their tongues?'. C.A. Joyce says: 'Two things are very bad for the heart: running upstairs and running down people'. Do you ever meet people - you meet them all the time, especially in Christian circles - who say: 'Well, I just speak my mind'? Perhaps that's why there are so many people around us that have given away so many different bits of their mind, that they have nothing left!

Friends, we've got to take this very, very seriously, because the teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ is that judgement is correct, but judgement should always begin with yourself. Then when you judge yourself you have earned the right, and you are in a better position to judge others. That's what the Lord is saying: 'Examine yourselves before you judge others. And when you examine yourselves, then and only then are you in a position to help others'. Learn to look at yourself rather than looking at others.

What is the reason why the Lord says this? The reason is simply this: in chapters 5 and 6, as I've already said, the Lord is speaking to us of prayer, almsgiving, fasting, righteous acts that should exceed the righteous acts of the Pharisees. Maybe, as you've been learning in chapters 5 and 6 how to do these things - and I hope that you're going away trying to implement them in your lives - by the time you come to chapter 7 there's a great danger that you're praying right, you're fasting right, you're giving right, you're doing all sorts of things right, and you think you've earned the right to look down your nose at someone else. See why the Lord leaves it until the last chapter! They may fall into the temptation of looking down at other believers.

Now before I go any further, the one thing I do not want to happen today is for you to apply this sermon to somebody else. Forget about it! For the illustration, the very crux and fundamental point in the whole sermon is not to do that! So please, right away, ignore, think that you're the only person in the Iron Hall this

morning, and apply everything to yourself. You'll be the better for it, and so will your brother and sister in Christ.

Let's look at the teaching. The first thing that the Lord tells us is: 'Your judgement will become your judge', your judgement will become your judge. Verses 1 and 2: "Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye measure, it shall be measured to you again. Why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye?", and then we have the illustration. But what the Lord is saying, what He is seeking to illustrate is this: God will judge you with the same standards that you judge others. Do you expect a lot from others? Do you? Well if you expect a lot from others, God will expect a lot from you. The Lord is saying, if you expect high standards of the church and the pastor and the elders and the missionaries and all your brothers and sisters in Christ, God will expect the same high standard of you. If you keep harping back to an age-old day of the glory of the church, and say to yourself, 'Christians today are not what they used to be', can I ask you: God will say to you, 'Are you today what Christians used to be?'. Do you see the danger of judging? It's not wrong now! But we've got to make sure that we are doing it according to the Lord's command.

The Lord is not saying - please don't get this into your mind - He is not saying that it is wrong to judge. Verse 1 is perhaps one of the most misinterpreted and misapplied verses in the whole of scripture. You get these airy-fairy liberal Christians continually pontificating this flowery phrase: 'Judge not that ye be not judged', and therefore they're imbibing and drinking in all the compromise and apostasy and false teaching that you can imagine. That is not what this verse means. I'll show you why. If you look at verse 15 the Lord says, in the same chapter: "Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravaging wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits". How are you meant to know them by their fruits if you don't judge whether they're a wolf or whether they're one of the sheep? In fact, if you look at this very section that we're reading from, in verse 6 the Lord tells us: "Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you". How are we meant to follow that command if we don't realise who the dogs are? Who the swine are? We've got to discern, there's got to be a measure of judgement. The Bible calls it righteous judgement. It is the capacity in the believer to exercise wisdom and careful discernment, and it is sadly lacking today.

It is what the Lord spoke of in John 7 verse 24: "Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment". That is the theme of this sermon: don't be like the Pharisees that judge on the outward appearance, but judge righteously according to God's principles and God's laws. You can see the Lord judging in His life, and you might say, 'He had grounds to judge', but listen to the denouncing terms that He speaks to the Pharisees in, as hypocrites and as vipers. If you go to the apostle Paul you see how, when he writes to the Corinthians, he concludes that they are carnal, that they are babes in Christ, that they need to seek out the meat and maturity and spirituality. In Paul's last letter to the church he mentions Alexander, Demas and Hermogenes, and he warns the people of God against these people. In Acts chapter 13 and in verse 10, Paul's words to Elymas the sorcerer - listen to this for a judgement: "O full of all subtlety and all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord?". Go to the Old Testament and you see Nathan to David, and he uses judgement in the correct sense and discernment, as it is found by the Spirit of God, when he looks at David, after telling him the parable about the man and the little lamb, and he says: 'Thou art the man!'.

All of these people - now this is the thing to note - they all judged others, but here's the crux of the matter: they all had a righteousness of character that qualified them to judge the other. Do you see the difference? In the New Testament we are instructed to judge. We are instructed to judge when disputes arise. They should be settled in the church and not in the court of law. The local church is to judge the serious sins of its members and take appropriate action, according to Matthew 18 and 1 Corinthians 5, and many other passages. We are to judge the doctrine and the teaching of teachers according to the word of God. We are to

discern who are believers by the command: "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness?". How are you meant to know who to fellowship with if you don't discern who is a believer and who is an unbeliever? Judge those who have the qualifications of elders and deacons - that's how they are appointed. We are to discern people who are unruly, those who are divisive. We are told to mark them and avoid them; those who are faint hearted, those who are weak, and treat them accordingly. Paul said in 1 Thessalonians 5:14: "Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feebleminded, support the weak, be patient toward all men". You've got to discern who needs comfort; you've got to discern who's weak to be strengthened; and you've got to discern who's unruly to rebuke them. It is right to judge.

Verse 2 talks about judgement and then it talks about measure. If the judgement is the standard or the harshness wherewith you judge, the measure is the amount of judgement that you give to another. What the Lord is asking us to do is consider, just like almsgiving and praying and fasting and righteous deeds, when you engage in the righteous act of discernment, when you are harsh upon another, when you pile on the measure of judgement that you like to, make sure that you're doing it righteously. I imagine that the large extent of our judgement is unrighteous. To err on the side of caution, just like swearing in the court of law - remember, we've seen week after week that the Lord is not making absolute prohibitions to these rules. When He says 'Judge not', it is not an absolute prohibition to judge. But what He is saying is: err on the side of caution. You are better not to judge than to judge unrighteously. You are better to be merciful than to be over-judgmental and critical. James outlines that in chapter 2 of his epistle verse 13, listen to what he says: 'Judgement is without mercy to him that hath shown no mercy'. Do you see it? If you judge another man, and you might judge him righteously, but if you don't show mercy - and even God shows mercy - God will judge you as you have judged, but if you choose to be merciful God will measure out mercy to you. Consequently, we find that James concludes his epistle with these words: 'Mercy glorifieth against judgement'. Mercy is more desirable in the child of God than a critical spirit, because you can't go wrong with mercy but you can go wrong in your judgement.

Let's turn for a moment to Romans 2, because it's important that we lay this foundation. We can't look at all the texts in scripture that deal with judgement and criticism, but always remember that the context of the Sermon on the Mount is the Lord's denunciation of the Pharasaical way of life. In Romans 2 the Lord, through the Holy Spirit in Paul the writer, is now directing his attention toward the Jew again, and specifically to the Pharasaical Jew who adheres to the law and the outward religion, rather than the religion of the heart. So remember that although it is to the Romans, he is now referring to the Jew. Verses 1 and 2: "Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest: for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things. But we are sure that the judgment of God is according to truth against them which commit such things". Then go to verse 21: "Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself?". Do you see it? You're telling someone else to do something. Do you do it? "Thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal? Thou that sayest a man should not commit adultery, dost thou commit adultery? Thou that abhorrest idols, dost thou commit sacrilege? Thou that makest thy boast of the law" - you see the Jew - "through breaking the law dishonourest thou God? For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you, as it is written".

What were the Pharisees doing? What were the Jews, even among the Gentiles, doing? I'll tell you what they were doing. They were playing God! A great deal of the evangelical strain of Christianity tries, in their little leather shoes, to play God. My friend, the sooner or later we realise the truth of the beatitude: 'Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy', the better off we will be. The Pharisees judged themselves wrongly. They thought they were the 'bee's knees'. They judged other people around them, the Jewish people, wrongly. More importantly than all of that, they judged the Lord Jesus Christ Himself wrongly. Your judgement will become your judge.

Secondly, your eye trouble blurs your judgement - your eye trouble blurs your judgement. Verses 3 and 4, we have this illustration: "Why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye" - or the sawdust, or the speck of wood - "but considerest not the beam" - or the plank - "that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye?". Finding fault is not difficult to those who are determined to find it, but there are people - and remember, don't apply it to anybody else - who are so obsessed with others that they miss the bigger problems in their own life. Usually their complaining spirit over petty things betrays a cover-up of their own greater problems. I believe the Lord had the Pharisees in mind. They were finding fault with others, but they were missing their own state of condemnation before a holy God. They couldn't see it.

Their eye trouble blurred their judgement in two ways. First, they were blind to their own faults. Richard Glover said well: 'None are such critics of small faults as those who are guilty of grave ones'. The blind guide is one thing, but a blind optician is absolutely ridiculous! You know, we're so serious when we look at the word of God. I believe the Lord is being humorous here. The Lord could be humorous! Think of this: a man walking down the road with a plank hanging out of his eye and going over to a little man [in] whom you can hardly see the speck at all, and telling him: 'You've a little speck in your eye and I'll get it out for you'. Do you see it? Guy King says: 'Humour was part of the human in Him'. What He is doing, as Spurgeon could say, as He was preaching, as any great preacher ought to do, He was tickling the oyster so that He could put the knife in! He is showing us the ridiculous nature of what it is to judge others when we are blind to our own faults. It is like the horse that is blinkered and cannot see anything because its focus is directed toward one thing specifically. And when you are looking to the problems, the faults, the failures - legitimate though they may be - in people that have let you down, you miss what a great sinner you are yourself. You become blind to your own faults.

That is the first way that eye trouble, and I use that as a pun: 'I trouble', can blur your judgement. The second way is 'tunnel vision to others' faults'. If this 'I trouble' - me and mine and self - causes you to be blind to your own faults, the other side of the coin is that it gives you a tunnel vision to the faults of others. Dean Alford says that this word here, 'beholdest', in verse 3 - "why beholdest thou" - in the Greek language suggests 'to stare'. If you picture this man with a big plank hanging out of his eye, and he is staring at his brother's little speck! You've seen it - people staring, and the more they stare, and the more they gaze upon an object - it wouldn't matter whether it was an inanimate silly piece of rock or something, if you stood for long enough staring at it, people would stop and stare with you. The Greek word means exactly that. As you stare and gaze at this object, your brothers and sisters gaze also. That is not to be the spirit of the child of God, drawing attention to the sins, the inadequacies, the backslidings of others.

How different it is from the words of Peter: "And above all things, have fervent charity among yourselves, for charity shall cover a multitude of sins." But we do what 1 Corinthians 13 says we ought not to do: we take pleasure in the sins of others. Do you see it? It's not wrong to judge, but I'm going to try as much I can to err on the side of mercy from now on. Do you know why? Because I know what a big sinner I really am. I don't know enough, but I'm learning more and more every day. My friend, rare is the person who can weigh the faults of others without putting his grubby thumb on the scales. Human nature usually tries to pull other people down so that you can build yourself up above them. Do you know, Christian, it is not necessary to blow out the flame and the light of another's, to let yours shine? It's not needed, for that is Pharisaeical. That is not Christianity! The Pharisees judged others to make themselves look good. You remember the Pharisee and the publican - both went up to the temple to pray and the Pharisee says, 'I'm glad I'm not like anybody else. I'm glad I'm not that old publican there!'. It made him feel good, but it was the old publican that went to his home justified! God desires not sacrifice and offering, but a broken and a contrite heart He will not despise.

The Christian should judge themselves to make others look good, not judge others to make themselves look good. Your judgement will become your judge, your 'I trouble' blurs your judgement, and thirdly: your self-surgery, or your self-judgement, will heal others. In fact, it will heal everyone including yourself. Verse 5: "Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye". You're a hypocrite! I mean, if we counted how many times that word crops up in the Sermon on the Mount! That's the theme of it - be a real Christian! Get rid of this Northern Ireland evangelical hypocrisy with all the talk, all the right phrases, all the right doctrines and charts and diagrams! Get rid of it! For it is hypocrisy - pretending to be what you are not; claiming to be righteous, yet condemning the unrighteous who are more righteous than you are righteous! How do you avoid it? I'll tell you how to avoid it. The Lord tells you: take the mote out of your own eye first. First! When you're looking for faults, child of God, do you know where to look? In the mirror! When you're going to judge your neighbour, do it when you're in front of the mirror because the neighbour is you.

Oh, if we judged ourselves! For the critic who starts with himself will have no time to take on outside contracts, for he'll have enough work on himself to keep him going. What I'm talking about here is not a perpetual autopsy to keep looking into yourself and be introvert, and forget about the forgiveness that is in Christ. What I am talking about is to confess your sins and be done with it. You don't want to keep analysing everything in your life, but what you do need is a healthy regular examination of your spiritual stance before God, especially when you're about to judge somebody else.

Your self-surgery is helpful and heals others, first of all because your vision is clear. Do you see it? Your vision is clear. If you take the plank out of your own eye you'll be able to see better yourself. We've had vision talked about already in this Sermon - chapter 6 and verses 22 and 23: "The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil", or diseased, "thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!". The Lord is saying that you've got to have good eyesight. Remember, we were told recently in our Sermon to refocus our vision. My friend, you can't have vision if you've a plank hanging out of your eye. Some in this Hall may have a chip on their shoulder rather than a plank hanging out of their eye, and it's doing you no good and it's doing no good to those that are around you.

Your vision is clear. You have true focus, and as Paul said to the Corinthians, "If you would judge yourself you would not be judged". But not only is your vision made clear, but other's vision is cleared through you. When you take the plank out of your own eye, you can see clearly to take the mote out of your brother's eye. This is the very proof that judgement is not wrong, because the reason that the Lord is instructing us to get rid of the plank in our eye is so that we can help our brother. In fact, it would be wrong not to help our brother when we have done that, but we must do it first. First "thine own", and then theirs!

But it's to be done in a certain way, and here's where I go wrong many-a-time. It's not just the fact that we judge people, it's the way we judge. We go to somebody and we say: 'You've got a bit of sawdust in your eye', and we pull a pitchfork out of our bag, and we're ready to just dig it out. We use a hammer to squash a fly. Friends, the word of God tells us that this exercise of judgement is to be done lovingly and tenderly, realising that 'there but for the grace of God go I, and I am what I am through the grace of God'. Paul said, "Speaking the truth in love". John Owen, the great theologian, said: "The nature and end of judgement must be corrective, not vindictive; for healing, not destruction". Do you see it? When you've been healed you'll not want to judge another to get the boot in, and to get one over. You'll want to judge to help your brother in trouble.

When someone has something in their eye you have to be very delicate when you're taking it out, don't you? We must be delicate. We can do more damage when we're trying to speck out of a brother's eye than the sin in itself, with our impatience and our insensitivity. The problem that the Lord is addressing here - He knows

humanity so well - is that usually those who do the correcting are those who think they are pure, but are openly walking around with a 2 by 4 hanging out of their eyes. Everybody sees it, except them of course. My friend, I have been touched - this is very corrective and devastating to our hearts - but I have been touched by the fact of how we are to look after one another in love with regards to this discernment and judgement. If we are to help one another we have got to get ourselves right.

The Lord's words to Peter in Luke 22 verse 32 were this: "When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren". 'When thou art converted' - don't try to tell me that he wasn't saved at that point. It's not what it's talking about. It's talking about after his backsliding, when he had turned and repented. You could substitute 'repentance', He is saying repentance is imperative, a continued repentance in your life, because we have a responsibility to one another. Repentance toward God in faith is so important, but repentance is important for each other, for then when we have repented we are in a position to take out the motes in others' eyes.

As I thought of this I was led to passages in the New Testament - and with this I finish - where we are exhorted to live for one another. Please take this to your heart. We are told to wash one another's feet; we are told to be devoted to one another in brotherly love; to give preference to one another in honour; to be of the same mind toward one another; to pursue the building up of one another; to accept one another; to admonish one another; care for one another; serve one another through love; bear one another's burdens; show forbearance and patience toward one another; be kind to one another; forgive one another; speak to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs; be subject to one another; regard one another as more important than yourself; do not lie to one another; teach one another; comfort one another; encourage one another; be at peace with one another; consider one another; pursue good to one another; do not speak against one another; confess your faults to one another; pray for one another; be hospitable to one another; clothe yourself with humility toward one another. Why? Do you want a summary of it all? Here it is: "This is My commandment, that ye love one another as I have loved you".

Let's bow our heads. I'm sorry if I have judged any of you unrighteously. My dilemma is the words of the Lord: "Love as I have loved you". How do we do that? It must be only through the Holy Spirit. Friends, we need to patch up a lot of problems. It's hard to go and say 'sorry'. It's even harder to go when it wasn't your fault. Friends, this above all things can hinder blessing.

Help us, Holy Father, to be more like the Lord Jesus Christ, who sought not His own, our Father, that was equal with God, but thought it not something to be grasped at, but made Himself of no reputation, took the form of a servant, became a man, and humbled Himself, became obedient unto the cross. Thank You for such an example, but more than that: thank You for such a Saviour. Thank You for such a Holy Spirit who is able to live Christ's life in us. Lord, help us to be poor of spirit, to be meek and to be merciful so that the Holy Ghost of God may take control of our lives and live this victorious life here and now in this old world. To the glory of Christ we pray, Amen.

The Sermon On The Mount - Chapter 19

"Don't Feed Dogs And Swine"

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Matthew 7:1-6

Now we've been going through the Sermon on the Mount these Lord's Day mornings, and we've reached chapter 7. We looked, last Sunday morning, at verses 1 to 5 and we read verses 1 to 6, but we've left verse 6 for our dealing this morning. So we're going to read all the verses again to remind ourselves of what the Lord Jesus Christ is saying. In the Breaking of Bread this morning, one of our brethren ministered from that passage in Matthew's gospel where the Lord Jesus was transfigured before three of the disciples - Peter, James and John. The voice came from the excellent glory, which said: "Behold, this is My beloved Son. Hear ye him". That is the reason why we are taking so much time studying the Sermon on the Mount, for these are the words of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

Verse 1: "Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye". Here's the verse that we're looking at today: "Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you".

Let's bow in a word of prayer together before we look at what the words of the Lord are saying to us. Our Father, we come before Thee again today and we would seek to hear Thy well-beloved Son in whom Thou art pleased. Father, we pray for Thy divine guidance. We pray for the Holy Spirit's presence to linger a while with us. We pray that the voice of God would be heard, and not of man. We pray that the teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ, that was spoken from His own lips 2000 years ago or so, may be real to us today; that it will not fall on deaf ears, but that they that would hear His voice would heed His voice and obey the word of God. Father, we as Thy people, would hear and follow Him. Help me, I pray, our Father. Bless these feeble words of a man, and take them up and use them we pray, our Father, to the glory of Christ. Amen.

In commentary upon the words of verses 1 through to verse 5 that we studied last week, E.L. Hamilton of Bath, a teacher of the word of God, tells of how he was introduced to three ladies of great Christian reputation. I believe that they were missionaries. But as E.L. Hamilton was introduced to them, they began criticising other missionaries of mutual acquaintance to them, saying how they ought not to do this or to do that or the other. They appealed to Mr Hamilton for his particular opinion on these other women. Mr Hamilton gave them no answer. He was silent before them. So they proceeded and went on criticising these sisters in Christ, until they insisted upon his opinion. After their insistence, Mr Hamilton replied by these words: 'I read in the Revelation of John that it is the work of Satan to accuse the brethren, and I am not going to take sides with him'. What a devastating rebuke that was for those ladies!

But there can be no more devastating rebuke than what we find in the seventh chapter, the third chapter of the Sermon on the Mount, in Matthew's gospel verses 1 to 5. I hope that you felt the x-ray vision of the Son of God last week as we studied these words. I know I felt humbled as I thought of how so often I myself judge you, judge other believers, without first judging myself with the measure that I judge the rest. In the light of the ministry that we were receiving last week from the Lord Jesus it's very easy for us, right throughout this whole sermon, to learn how to love one another; to learn how to love our neighbour and then

go on a little bit further and learn how to love our enemies - those who do not show any love toward us. We've been learning how to graciously mirror the Son of God in His compassion, in His impartiality as He walked among men, and rained upon the righteous and the unrighteous. The Son of God's splendour shines upon the righteous and the unrighteous. He is no respecter of persons, and so ought we to be.

Yet there's a grave danger, as we walk among our friends and our relatives and our neighbours and our work colleagues, that as we try to relate to them, as we try to love them as our neighbours, friends and even enemies, that we make the mistake of thinking that the Lord Jesus is saying that we are to behave towards everybody the same way. In verses 1 to 5 the Lord has been warning us against discriminating against people unrighteously. He has been warning us against misjudging people when we have failed to judge ourselves first. We took a lot of time and had a lengthy discussion as to how we can judge and how we ought not to judge. The Lord is not saying, in verses 1 to 5, especially verse 1, that we are never, as Christians, to judge others or to judge other things. But what the Lord is saying is: 'Judge yourself first'. 'If ye judged yourselves', as Paul says, 'you would not be judged'. Then He goes on in His illustration to say that it is when you judge yourself, when you take the plank that is in your own eye out, you can see more clearly to judge your brother or sister in Christ. In fact, we were going as far to say: if, when you take that plank out of your eye, and you judge yourself, you fail to judge your brother and sister by taking the mote out of their eye. You fail your brother and sister, and you fail the commandment of God.

Judgement is not wrong. Unrighteous judgement is wrong. In fact, a lack of judgement is wrong after you judge yourself. So that leads us into this verse 6, which is saying exactly that. The Lord is telling us that there is a lack of discrimination at times within the life of believers. He's not talking now about over-discrimination, but a lack of discrimination. You see right throughout this Sermon - at least I hope you're seeing it week after week - that the Lord is warning against both extremes in every case. The Lord is speaking to us about a balanced Christian life. As C.H. Spurgeon, the great preacher, said: 'The saints are not to be judges, but equally they are not to be simpletons'. You are not a judge, I am not a judge, but that doesn't mean we walk through life blindfolded and ignorant and naive of what is going on around us.

Indeed, I would say that the general problem in society at large today is lack of discernment, misjudgement and ignorance of the demarcations between right and wrong. People no longer understand that there are absolute rights and absolute wrongs. There is this airy-fairy liberalism; a relativism that what was wrong in yonder year is no longer wrong today. It develops as things become more acceptable to society. Oh, how our world could do with a greater dose of judgement and discrimination. Sad to say, what we find in the world we often find in the church. We find in the church at large there is a lack of discrimination, and much of it is built upon verse 1 of this chapter. People say, and pontificate in a proud way: 'You should not judge others lest God judges you' - but that is ignorant of the entire teaching of this passage. For the Lord is, in fact, saying, in verse 6 especially, that there is a grave need that the child of God does discriminate, that the child of God does judge and discern.

We must discern because we are the sheep of God. The reason why the sheep need to discern is that there are dogs at large and hogs at large, and there are some wolves in sheep's clothing. If the sheep are to survive, and look after one another, and thrive, and grow, and feed off one another, and reproduce, it is important that we discern between the hogs, the dogs and the wolves. It's remarkable, isn't it, if you've been going through the Sermon with us, as you've noted some of the beautiful words of the Lord Jesus Christ, some of His beautiful metaphors and similes and descriptions, how He has described to us that we ought not to worry about what we wear: 'for look at the lilies of the field, for they are arrayed in greater splendour than Solomon in all his glory. Don't worry about what you're fed upon and what you eat and drink. Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor toil nor reap, but your heavenly Father careth for them. How much more shall He care for you'. What a blessing these verses have been! What a description of the beautiful providence of God for His children!

But we see that the Lord Jesus Christ was balanced even in His preaching. It was not all blue skies and good things. But the Lord is not ignorant of the fact that there are those at large within the world and among the church who are dangerous. The Lord's words of beauty give way to these words of ugliness and terror. He has moved from talking about birds and lilies to talking about dogs and swine. Our Lord has spoken some of the most tender and beautiful words in all of literature, but to the other extreme He has also spoken some of the most judgemental, scathing, scorching words that have ever fallen from the lips of mankind. He was outspoken against Herod Antipa - He called him 'that fox'. Of the scribes and the Pharisees that we find as players within this whole Sermon - those who are hypocrites - He says of them that 'you have an outward appearance of holiness. You are like whitewashed tombs. You are clean on the outside yet you are dead men's bones on the inside'. He called them, on one occasion, 'a brood of vipers'. Here He tells us in verse 6 that human beings can sometimes act like animals, and when human beings act like animals they should be called such.

I hope you see the seriousness of the words of the Lord today. Indeed, we will see throughout this sermon this morning the seriousness of an unholy ungodly man in the sight of Christ. But really if we were to narrow it down to what this verse teaches and what we will learn today, it's simply this: we as believers must discern who are the dogs, who are the swine, what are the pearls, what are the holy things, and we must learn not to give any of them to them. Avoid - if I could put it like this - the prostitution of holy things. You will remember, as we have been going through this Sermon, that the Lord Jesus Christ has always had in His mind the law of God - the Ten Commandments and the first five books written by Moses at the front of your Bible. The reason being that the Pharisees accused Him of coming into the world to destroy the law of Moses and the law of God. But the Lord Jesus has said already, and we have studied it in weeks gone by, He said: "I have come not to destroy the law but to fulfil it" - to fill it up, to be the accomplishment, in fact, to make that which was lacking in the law come to fruition. If you are familiar with the book of Leviticus and the book of Deuteronomy, you will know that the various cleansing laws and ceremonial laws and rights that we find within that book were spoken to God's people Israel for this reason: that you might make a difference between clean and unclean, between unholy and holy.

In the light of that, let us try to spot the difference. That's our first thing we're going to do - spot the difference. We need to ask the question: who are the dogs and who are the hogs? Verse 5 leads to verse 6 where we find then these dogs spoken of. If you go through the Old Testament you will find that dogs in Palestine and in Israel specifically in this day and age, they were not like our little 'Spot' the dog at home - our little domestic pet, man's best friend. They were more like wolves: wilder, more savage than the dogs that we have here in the west. They were large ugly pariahs, mongrels, savages and scavengers going about the town in the rubbish dumps, and even disposing of rubbish themselves. As you went through Palestine in this day and age you could see these dogs almost everywhere, prowling about the garbage and the rubbish in the streets. They threatened people, they howled at them, and snarled at them. They were greedy creatures, shameless creatures. In short, a dog was contemptible - everyone hated him! The dog came to be a picture and a metaphor of everything that was contemptible within a human being. In fact, in the Bible, to be eaten by a dog was the sign of God's judgement - and you remember that Jezebel the queen, who was an ungodly woman, was eaten by dogs in the streets because of her rebellion toward God.

So 'dog' is used in scripture as a metaphor, a description of something or someone that is defiled, someone that is unclean, even a Gentile - a non-Jew in the Old Testament. But the phrase is much wider than all that because as we go into Philippians chapter 3 and verse 2 Paul talks of antagonistic Jews as dogs - not just non-Jews, Gentiles, but Jews who were against the Lord Jesus Christ and rejecting His gospel. He says: "Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the concision". Paul again, in the book of Galatians, applies the metaphor of a dog to Christians who hate one another instead of loving one another. He says: 'You bite and devour one another' - the inference is 'like dogs'. Then we find in the book of the Revelation

that in the eternal state when heaven and earth shall pass away, and when the unregenerate shall be turned into hell, and God's people shall enter into heaven, that outside the holy Jerusalem were dogs: "for without were dogs". You see how this metaphor doesn't just apply to Gentiles, non-Jews. It doesn't just apply to Gentiles who are unclean ceremonially and separated from God's Israel, but it can even apply to false teachers in Christendom. It can apply to believers who are not walking in fellowship and who are fighting with one another. It can be applied to the unsaved who will be cast into hell. So that's a short definition of the dogs.

Then we look at the hogs, the swine as the Lord Jesus says. These swine are not like the 'little piggies' that we talk about in nursery rhymes, but these swine were more like the wild boar that we know. This again is a savage creature, a vicious creature. In fact, in the gospels we see the contempt that swine is held in as you look at the demoniac of Gadara, for the swine became the chosen habitat of demons. When the demons wanted to go somewhere they had many places to choose, but they chose to go into the swine. You see their contempt. In the Old Testament law the eating of swine, pig, was an abomination unto God. The law said that you were allowed to eat of any meat that had cloven feet - that means a hoof that was separated in two bits. You can't eat a dog because it has a paw, but you can eat a cow because it has cloven feet. But you see, the pig, the swine has also cloven feet, but God gave an extra law in His precious word and it was this: that you are not to eat of any meat that does not chew the cud. So even though the swine and the pig had cloven feet it didn't qualify as a beast that you could eat, because the pig does not chew the cud. So you can see for a moment that the swine could have the appearance of being alright to eat. If we can put it in the Old Testament law language: it can have the appearance of being holy, but it is unholy for it does not chew the cud. Outwardly it may look right, it may look better than the dog, but if I can in the words of Paul, it has a form of godliness but it denies the power thereof. The dog is more obvious because it has a paw, it has not a cloven foot and it neither chews the cud. It has neither the appearance nor the reality of holiness. You can spot a dog quicker as unholy than a pig. Yet the fact of the matter is, what the Lord is saying here is: both of them, whether they have the appearance of holiness or not, are dogs and swine and are unholy. Do you see it?

Of course, we've been learning week after week that the Pharisees were those who had the appearance of godliness, but did not have a relationship with God in their heart. In fact, Peter in his epistle in chapter 2 and verse 21 and 22 says: "For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow" - the pig - "that was washed to her wallowing in the mire". That is the only other verse in scripture where you have the dog and the pig together. Peter is applying to people who profess to be Christians, like to be seen as Christians, and somewhat have believed in their head intellectually the truth of God's word, but there is no reality in their life. That lack of reality is evidenced by the fact that, like a dog, they have gone and licked up their old vomit, their old ways, their old sins; and like a pig, after being washed and cleaned they have gone back to wallow in the mire. Do you see it? The Lord is talking about people who are near to the door of the church. We could say, people who have received some kind of spiritual education yet they have never ever been truly born again and saved. Like the pig, they have been washed in some kind of noble ideal, some kind of moral religiosity. The appearance is there but there is not a cleansing through and through, through the forgiveness of sins. They have received some measure of the truth but they have rejected the ultimate truth of all - the Lord Jesus Christ who is the way, the truth and the life.

I hope you spot the difference. Certainly the difference between dogs, hogs and sheep - I'm no farmer but I can tell that much difference! You can tell the difference between the hog and the dog. The hog is the one who may have an appearance of godliness but no reality, and the dog is the one who everybody can see and know is without Christ and God.

Let's look now at why we are not allowed to feed them. We've spotted the difference between these animals, and now the Lord is putting up a sign: 'Don't feed the animals'. You see, when the plank is removed from your own eye, and it allows you to judge and to help in love and in tenderness your brother and sister in Christ, you can see clearly to judge righteously. But you will find, if you have ever done it, and I have done it, that you're not always received well. That can be one of the distinctions between the dog, the pig and the sheep. You see, Proverbs (and I would encourage you to read right through the whole book of Proverbs) in chapter 9 and verse 8 says that the difference between a fool and a wise man is his ability to accept reproof and rebuke: "Reprove not a scorner, lest he hate thee: rebuke a wise man, and he will love thee". The mark of a sheep is that when you rebuke it, it follows you. The mark of a hog and a dog is when you rebuke it, it turns to bite you.

What are these holy things that we are to feed them upon? What are these pearls that the Lord Jesus Christ speaks of? If you look at verse 6, and that word 'holy': "Give not that which is holy unto the dogs". The word 'holy' in Greek is 'hagios', which is made up of two Greek words. One is the word 'a', and the other word is 'ge' - 'a' means 'without', it's a preposition, and 'ge' means 'earth'. So the word 'hagios' - 'holy' in the Bible - means 'without earth'. Do you see it? Something that is apart from the earth. Something that is opposite from that which is common, and which is material, and which is natural around us - but something that is above the earth, something that is heavenly, something that is supernatural. If I was to define holiness to you today, or something that was holy, it simply means something that is separated to God; something that is distinct from the things of mere men; something that is special, and God has marked to be special. The word 'saint' is not reserved to Mother Theresa or Saint Augustine or anything that the Roman Catholic Church would teach us, but the 'saint' means any person who has been saved by the grace of God and separated for God's use. That has the root meaning: apart from the earth. Sanctify is the process of being separated to God. Holiness has the root word. 'Hallowed be Thy name' has the same root meaning. So the Lord is saying: 'Don't give that which is without the earth, apart from the earth, beyond the earth to the swine and to the pigs'.

I believe that the holy things that are spoken of here by the Lord Jesus Christ are things that are exclusively owned by the believer; truths that God has given us. They're without the earth, they're not from earth. We haven't thought about them, we haven't divined them, but they have been given by God to us for our special use - holy things, the general truth that has been revealed to us from God. That's the holy thing.

The pearls - if you look at verse 6 you will see that they are described as 'your pearls'; not just 'pearls' but 'your pearls'. There's something personal about this and I believe that this is outlining God's personal blessings to us; if you like, personal experiences which you have received from God and are precious to you. Do you see what we're separating them here to mean? Holy things are God's general truth and teaching, the things revealed in His word that are given to us for our learning and for our blessing. But these pearls are ours, they are personal experiences that God has given to us to enjoy from Him. The big question is this: why should we not feed these to the dogs and to the swine? As if we need to ask that question! If you think about it for a moment, I happen to believe that in the mind of the Lord Jesus, He is thinking about throwing a pearl to a pig. If you threw a pearl to a pig, I imagine it would think it was some kind of nut or pea or bit of meal, and it would begin to attempt to eat it. Then it would find that it is inedible, and perhaps it would spit it out if it had put it in its mouth. Or it maybe only would sniff the thing to find out if it was food at all and if it smelt good, and if it didn't find it, it would turn on its heel and trample it underfoot. Do you see it? Can you see the animal first glaring hungrily at this pearl, and thinking that they're about to gob down some food? But then when they pounce on the pearl you can see the swift disillusionment that sets in, for it's too hard to chew. It's tasteless. It's unappetising. So they turn and trample it underfoot!

D.A. Carson, who is an eminent Bible scholar and preacher, in his commentary on the Sermon on the Mount, says this - and he's from the nation of Canada, so he knows what he's talking about - he says: 'Camping can be enjoyed in the vast wilderness areas of North America, but one of the rules to be observed unfailingly is:

don't feed the bears. Feed the ground squirrels, feed the deer, feed the racoons, even feed the coyotes, but don't feed the bears. If they are not satisfied they will turn and tear you to pieces'. Listen, the Lord is saying: the riches of God's truth that He has given to us to use exclusively for ourselves as the church of Jesus Christ are not for the swine; they are not for the dogs. The personal truth that God has given to you, beware how you share it with other people because they can turn on you and they can tear you. But the whole point of this teaching is this: there are persons - not everybody - but there is a type and a group of people within the church who masquerade faith in Jesus Christ, and they are persistently vicious, they are irresponsible, they are unappreciative - why? Listen: because the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him, neither can he know them because they are spiritually discerned.

What is the Lord telling us? Please bear with me for a few moments, because I want you to understand this important teaching from the word of God. As people who are privileged to receive God's truth, if you are saved and converted by His grace, you've received the precious truth of the word of God, truth held by God's people down all the ages, it is our property! It's given for the people of God. The Old Testament priests had the privilege of entering into the tabernacle and the temple to approach the holiness of God in the sanctuary. That was their privilege, it wasn't everybody else's privilege. In Psalm 137 the exiles beside the river of Babylon wouldn't sing a song for the heathen, they wouldn't sing the songs of Zion because they were unworthy of it - they were different than that, these were not the songs of drunkards. Can you imagine the Old Testament priests sacrificing the meat on the altar and then throwing the meat to the dogs? He couldn't do it! It's holy!

In the New Testament, look at our Lord Jesus, the Master didn't do miracles for unbelievers - He would not do miracles for men and women who would not believe. The meanings of the parables of the Kingdom that you find in Matthew 13 were hidden from the Jews, but explained privately to His own disciples. The vital truths regarding the Father and the Son were hidden from the wise and the prudent and revealed unto babes. The prophetic discourse in Matthew 24 was spoken only unto the disciples. The holy discourse in the Upper Room was suitable for the Lord's apostles only after Judas Iscariot had left them! He was not transfigured before the vulgar crowd, but before His own people. When He rose from the dead gloriously, He was not seen by the unbelieving world after His resurrection.

There are those vicious and unappreciative people of that disposition, and I believe perhaps it's the character of this age. Cynical mockery against God and His word; intellectual arrogance; their love of moral decay; they vaunt their self-sufficiency in the face of God - and they are utterly impervious to the person and the work of Jesus Christ God's Son. These people are in grave danger!

Can I say to you: do you realise that there are people in this world who will never be saved? Note what I'm saying: not 'cannot' be saved, but 'will never' be saved - because they have rejected the truth of God's word. Now don't misunderstand what I am saying, we must take the gospel, as Christ has said, to every creature. But what the Lord is teaching us here is balance - although we go and tell every man, woman, boy and girl that Jesus died for them, and that that death is sufficient to cleanse them from all their sins - we must never cheapen the gospel by a ministry that lacks discernment! Discern the difference between holy and unholy. We are not to endlessly take the gospel to those who continually scorn it. It's done in respect for that which is holy, not in contempt for that which is unholy - the dogs and the hogs - that's not why the Lord says it, but because these things are holy and God is holy, we should never allow holy things to be cheapened. Never.

My friend can I, in these closing moments, apply this to our lives in five ways. One, quickly: those who give holy things unto the unregenerate - what am I talking about? I'm talking about churches that will baptise unbelievers, babies and all. Those who will give the bread and the wine - the Lord's Supper - to those who are eating and drinking damnation upon themselves because they are not converted. Those who will give church fellowship to unbelievers, participation as deacons and elders, and ministers even of God who do not believe! Those who fellowship with those who are in error are giving pearls and holy things to dogs!

Two: we can cheapen holy things as the people of God. When we do not attend the Lord's Table, when the diaconate becomes a chore rather than a privilege, when divine truth is scorned, church fellowship is seen as unnecessary - an extra, rather than the apostle's holy doctrine. Three: we must beware of those who have crept in unawares to pervert doctrine and to divide brethren, and we must deprive them of the privileges of God's holy things! Four: we must beware of baring our heart to everyone, because many a man or woman can turn and rend you. Five: when witnessing in the gospel, please remember to respect Christ and His gospel more than the sinner. Love the sinner with all your heart, but don't cheapen the gospel for anyone! Zealous soul-winner beware of giving precious things to the wrong people - but apathetic Christian don't use this verse to see everybody as a swine and a dog, in order to get you out of executing the gospel commission. There're so many Calvinistic brethren who take these verses to an extreme - don't do that!

Let me say this: what, perhaps, holy things cannot do, a holy life will do - a holy life. My friends, I don't want you to see dogs and pigs - it's very hard for me to define this, but let me tell you this: look unto Jesus. Look at what He did, the divine discernment of the Master, His patience with Thomas and Peter, but for Herod Antipas He didn't have one single word! His curse upon Capernaum, for they didn't listen to His messages, they didn't apply the lessons out of His miracles and mighty works to their lives. He instructed His own disciples not to remain too long with those who would reject the preaching of the gospel. In the parable of the fig tree He told of how God has patience with men, but it is not endless! My friend who is unsaved in this gathering, listen to me: God is longsuffering, not willing that any should perish - but this verse is teaching you today: "He, that being often reprov'd hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy". Can I ask you: if Christ will not allow His servants to plead with you indefinitely, do you think His Spirit will? I think not.

Let us bow our heads. Let me say that the Lord Jesus is full of love and compassion for you dear soul, full of love. He couldn't be any more full of love, for He died on Calvary's cross to save you. But let me tell you this: with such great love shown toward you, there's a great responsibility upon you to repent of your sin and put your faith and trust in Him. My friend, if you do not do that, there are grave consequences - not only is there hell, but there is the prospect of going through life with no one ever speaking a word in the gospel to you again. Will you come to Him today?

So-called believer who is walking in error, would you examine yourself to see if you're just acting like pigs and hogs and dogs, or whether you're really a sheep or not? Some behaviour in Christians is beyond my imagination. Let us all examine ourselves, that we may be found in the faith.

Father, we thank Thee for these scathing words of the Lord, but they are so necessary. We thank Thee that greater love hath no man than Christ, for He gave His life for us, His friends. But Father, help everyone in this gathering today to realise - whether believer or unbeliever - the great responsibility there is to follow truth and follow Christ. Give grace to decide, and bless us now as we part, in His lovely name we pray, Amen.

The Sermon On The Mount - Chapter 20

"Encouragement To Pray - Part 1"

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Matthew 7:7-12

Now we're turning in our Bibles to Matthew's gospel chapter 7 once again, Matthew's gospel chapter 7. We're beginning to read at verse 7 - now remember that these again, I keep reminding you but it's so important that you see where the ministry is coming from, it is coming from none other than our Lord Jesus Christ. These are His words again: "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him? Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets".

Verses 7 and 8 encapsulate one of the greatest promises that we have in all of the word of God. What an amazing promise this is: 'Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you' - it is a staggering declaration from our Lord Jesus Christ. We do not marvel, therefore, that men said: 'Never man spake like this man'. When we read His words like these, we too marvel at His words - the common people in His day heard Him gladly, but when we hear promising words concerning prayer like this our ears are cocked, we listen carefully: 'Is this real? Can this possibly be so - that whatever we ask God gives us, whatever we seek after we find, whatever we knock God's door for, He opens the door and He gives these things to us?'.

Of course we shouldn't really marvel at these astounding words of the Lord Jesus, because He Himself - the Lord Jesus Christ - was and is the most astounding personality that this world has ever witnessed. As we read the Gospels He is continually astounding the crowds that followed Him. He's filling His followers with absolute amazement at the words that He speaks and the deeds that He does. There are always surprises for those who follow the Lord Jesus Christ. He was unpredictable in a divine way, because He was and is the God-man, God manifest in flesh. Of course, His miracles are still the talk of history. Men in theological and historical halls of the universities of our land and our world still debate what these miracles were: 'Were they folk-stories? Are they philosophical teachings, metaphors, and similes to convey the Lord Jesus Christ's teaching? Or were they real miracles?'. But yet today, still, they tantalise men and women and boys and girls.

Yet it's very interesting that those who followed the Lord Jesus Christ were never heard to ask: 'Lord, teach us to do wonders. Lord, teach us to raise the dead, teach us to cast out demons, teach us how to tell parables just like You tell them, teach us how to preach, teach us how to study doctrine'. No, what we hear from His disciples are these immortal words: 'Lord, teach us to pray'. Because as these twelve individuals witnessed the life of the Lord Jesus Christ it was not the miracles that were the outstanding feature, it wasn't even His words and His teaching, but it seems that it was the prayer life of the Lord Jesus Christ that struck them with such impact that they should resound: 'Lord, teach us to pray'. It was His prayer life that struck them!

I tried to imagine them this week, as they follow the Lord Jesus Christ. I want you to try and see it in your mind's eye, and as He goes a little further He gets down on His knees, and as He lifts His eyes heavenward and these twelve disciples witness the holy awe and face of the Lord Jesus Christ - a man in absolute communion with God! Can you see their hush as they witness it? It has never been witnessed before! So they say: 'Lord, teach us to pray'.

My friends listen, when the Lord teaches us to pray it's imperative that we listen. When He starts to tell us how we ought to pray, it's important that we stop and listen to what is in the Master's mind - the Master of prayer - what He says prayer really is. As you know, if you've been travelling through the Sermon on the Mount with us week after week, we have the Lord's prayer given in this great Sermon - already He has taught us how to pray, but now He closes this Sermon in chapter 7 and He's returning to the subject of prayer. Prayer is the only subject in the Sermon on the Mount that the Lord Jesus Christ repeats. It's of such importance, He holds it so important in His heart and His mind, that He brings it again to His disciples and to His children, and so He brings it again to us today.

Now the Sermon up until now has been an instruction of the precepts of the Kingdom of God. The Lord has been taking the law of God from the Old Testament and He has been re-expounding it in the light of His coming. We have been commanded and instructed to do so many things in the weeks that have gone by but now, as He closes this Sermon, He's not telling us what to do - now He's beginning to tell us how God gives us the power to do what He has commanded. Remember recently we were looking at judgement? Chapter 7 begins: 'Judge not, that ye be not judged', and we looked at how we ought not to judge others, and how we ought to judge others to help them. We looked last week at how we are not to cast our pearls before swine, or holy things to the dogs. I don't know about you, but I've felt very inadequate as I've been studying these verses because there's so much of a load on our shoulders to be able to judge who is a dog, who is a swine, and who is a sheep. We've been told to love our neighbours as ourselves, we've been told to love our enemies! We've been told not to murder or not to hate, not to commit adultery with our eyes, to be meek, to be humble, to be poor of spirit - I don't know about you, but as we've gone down these verses week after week after week, I'm becoming very poor in spirit as I realise my own inadequacies when it comes to the Lord Jesus Christ's Sermon. For that reason, after these three chapters as we find ourselves beside ourselves in knowing how to even begin walking in fellowship and in obedience to the Lord Jesus, the Lord tells us how it can be done.

It's like what James says: 'If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God'. The Lord Jesus is saying: 'If any of you lack these things that I have been teaching you about, it's time that you come and ask for them!' That's what this verse is talking about: 'Ask, and it shall be given unto you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you' - in its context it's specifically speaking of this life of the Kingdom that the Lord Jesus Christ has been teaching about, the virtues that He has just expounded in His great Sermon. Ask for these virtues, seek after God, knock on the door of the narrow road, and it will be opened unto you. God is saying: 'Ye shall seek me, when ye search for me with all your heart, then I will be found of you'.

Let's be honest with ourselves, let's take a moment out here and examine ourselves: how we fare in this Sermon. How have you fared so far with loving your enemies, and with judging people righteously and not unrighteously? How have you fared with adultery in the mind and in the heart, with murder, hate, slander? How have you fared with coming to the altar with your gift when you have fought against your brother? How do we fare when it comes to these things? We don't! We are sinners, and of all men most miserable - but what the Lord Jesus is saying is: 'Come today, come and ask for these things'. The tragedy in the church today is that these characteristics are not characteristic of Christians in our age - why? Why do people not love their enemies? Why do people judge people unrighteously, and then when they do judge people rightly they judge them not from a way of love - they see something wrong in their life, but it's not an arm round them, it's a fist to them! I'll tell you why: because the church of Jesus Christ is not characterised today by prayer! It does not ask for these things, so it does not have these things.

D. A. Carson, who is a very adept expositor of the word of God, has noticed this too in his writings. Listen: 'Our environment loves hustle and bustle, smooth organisation and powerful institutions, human self-confidence and human achievement, new opinions and novel schemes, and the church of Jesus Christ has

conformed so thoroughly to this environment that it is often difficult to see how it differs in these matters from contemporary paganism'. The big test of how we fare in the Sermon on the Mount, believe it or not, is this test: what is your prayer life like, for your prayer life will determine how God gives you all these things in this great Sermon? If we have low spiritual vigour and blessing within the assembly, it is directly traced to our low prayer life. James says: 'Ye have not because ye ask not, and ye have not also because when ye ask ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts'. But the Lord says that if we pray - what's He saying? If we get to this stage at the end of this Sermon and we're taught all these things, and we're absolutely buried under all these obligations, and thinking: 'I'm a Christian, I can't even do one of these things let alone all the teaching of this Sermon' - the Lord is saying: 'Now, if you're in that position, that's great, but you've got to move on from that to ask God for these things'. Ask Him!

The Lord says that if we pray, there are certain promises that we can be absolutely sure of. That's the first thing that I want to leave with you, simply this: prayer works. That's a bit of a double meaning: prayer works - in other words, it does work, but also the other side of the coin is the works of prayer, the workings of prayer like the working of a clock; how prayer works. The Lord Jesus starts first of all by our side of prayer. He speaks of our asking, and He says: 'Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and the door shall be opened unto you'. The first thing He says is: 'Ask - concerning the conduct expected of you within this Sermon, it will be given to you when you ask for it. Seek - seek after the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and only when you seek for it will you find it. Knock at the narrow gate, and it will be opened to you and you can enter into it'.

To ask is asking generally, but to seek is seeking specifically and to knock is knocking closely. I want you to see, as we ask, seek and knock, there is a progression in the movement of the Lord Jesus' words. He is saying that each action is a little step further on than the previous one. You ask, but then after asking you don't get what you're looking for; so then you seek, and if you continually seek and still don't get then you come closer to the door of God and you begin to knock - and you keep knocking until God gives you what you're asking for. Each step - ask, seek and knock - is a step on from the previous one. It is an increasing in earnestness, an increasing in eagerness, an increasing after God and after your answer - but the key that's starting it all, the whole process of prayer, is to ask.

If you take a casual look down these two verses, 7 and 8, you will count five times you find the word ask within this whole passage. We are to come as children, just simply as a child turns to a father in need. You know all the traits of a child - we could spend a whole series studying the word of God and what the Lord has to say about children and how we ought to behave like children - but the most simple picture that I have in my mind of a little child and a parent is the little hand in Daddy's hand. Walking down the street, he hasn't a care in the world, he doesn't realise he's in any danger if he is because his hand is in Daddy's hand. My friends, that is what the Lord is trying to communicate through these verses. There is a dependence in prayer, when you come to God in prayer it is an indication to God that you are utterly and absolutely dependent upon Him. You're acknowledging on your part your need, and acknowledging on God's part His ability to meet your need. So, if you're not a humble person forget about prayer - that's maybe why you don't pray.

There is dependence that is needed. Now, the tense - this is technical, but it's very very interesting - the tense in the verbs used in this verse justifies this rendering, listen to this: 'Keep on asking, keep on seeking'. The Greek is literally: 'Keep on knocking'! Now if you go into Revelation 3 and verse 20 you have a similar tense, but this time it's on the part of the Lord Jesus Christ. He says: 'Behold, I stand at the door and knock', but literally in the Greek it is this: 'Behold, I keep on standing at the door, and I keep on knocking at the door' - what a poignant picture. Perhaps the Lord has been knocking, Christian, at your heart's door for a very long time to have communion with you, and to come into you and sup with you and you with Him. What a poignant picture: the Lord Jesus knocking with His nail-printed hand continually, keeping on coming and keeping on asking, but the Lord says you've got to have that attitude when you come in prayer too! Keep on asking, keep on seeking, keep on knocking!

It's not only an expression of dependence, but it is also an expression of persistence - persistent prayer. Ask God, and if you keep on asking then seek God; and if you keep on seeking and nothing comes then knock right on God's door - but keep going until you get what you're asking for! If you think of it like this: you go round to your next door neighbour perhaps for a bottle of milk, or a cup of sugar, and you don't go round you just shout over the fence: 'So and so, would you give me a cup of sugar?'. They don't come to the window, so you shout again: 'Give me a cup of sugar!'. No response, so you go out the driveway and go up their driveway and you seek them - you look to see if they're out gardening in the back garden, if they're fiddling in the garage with the car. But you're looking for them and you still can't find them, and when you can't find them after seeking eventually you go to the front door and you knock - and you keep knocking until they come. Now my friends, that is simply what the Lord Jesus is saying: 'Ask, if you don't get, seek; if you can't get seeking, then knock'.

The big question that baffles us all is: why doesn't He just come when we ask? Why does He make us seek? Why does He make us knock? Why did the friend not come out right away when he was just asked to come? My friend, this is a very important question I want to spend a bit of time - even if I don't get through it this morning. There could be a number of reasons, and I know that some of you are sitting here saying: 'I know these verses, I've known them since I was a youth, but in my own personal experience what I ask for I don't get, what I seek after I don't find, and when I knock God just shuts the door in my face!'. Can I ask you first of all: are you losing contact with God? Is there sin in your life, yet you're still expecting answered prayer? You have a bitter spirit, there's something wrong with you, you've something against your brother, you're dabbling in sin in the dark places - nobody knows about it, it's in your mind, wherever it may be: but if the Lord sees iniquity in our heart He will not hear us. Maybe that's why this verse is not working for you. Let me say to you that when Mary and Joseph lost the boy, the Lord Jesus Christ, it was three days before they found Him. They only lost Him in one day, but it took them three days till they found Him again. When we lose contact in prayer with the Lord Jesus it can be harder to get back into that fellowship after we've left Him. I would urge you today that if you're not knowing answered prayer in your life it could be that there is iniquity between you and your God, and He's not hearing you.

It could be sin, secondly it could be this lack of persistence - that you're only asking God, but when He doesn't give you what you want or what you're looking for you walk away and you say: 'Well, God didn't hear me', but you don't go to the next stage and seek, you don't go to the next stage and knock. Is persistence lacking? At times what the Lord is testing us on is whether we really want the thing or not, whether we're just content to come and ask God for it, or whether we're content to hold on like old Jacob that we were studying recently, and say: 'Lord, I will not let You go until You bless me'. Persistence: asking, then seeking, and then knocking.

Now let me say this: if it's not those two things, if it's not sin in your life and it's not a lack of importunity, persistence and insistence in prayer, you're either one of three types of Christians. The first type of Christian is the one that doesn't esteem prayer at all, the one who doesn't value it - in other words, the one who thinks he has need of nothing or she has need of nothing, and so they don't come in prayer. They maybe just, deep down in their heart, don't believe that it works, and they don't believe that this verse really answers prayer. Then there is the second type of person who believes this verse but fumbles at it. They do pray but they seem to not get what they're asking for, it seems that God is letting them down - they're fulfilling their obligation: they're dependent, they're persistent, but God has not yet answered their prayer. Then thirdly there are those who are actively proving the promises of God day by day in their individual experiences - and just because there aren't too many of them around, don't think there aren't some, there are some!

I imagine a lot of you are in the second category, and you say: 'David, I do seek, I do ask before I seek, and then if I don't get what I'm looking for when I'm seeking then I go knocking - but nothing seems to happen!'.
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I have people come to me in a pastoral capacity for counselling and they say to me: 'David, God is not answering my prayers! He's not! I've a child that needs to be saved, and I'm praying, I'm weeping, I'm breaking my heart - I've a need in my life financially, with my job...' - whatever it may be, there are people and they come to the conclusion that God is not and will not answer their prayer. My friend, listen: if you are in that second category, it may not be sin that is your problem, it may not be a lack of persistence that is your problem, but it may be a fundamental misunderstanding with these two verses that is your problem.

Let me elaborate on that for a few moments. One author writing upon this verse says that it has a deceptive simplicity. Now that doesn't mean in any way that our Lord was deceptive, He could not be deceptive, but the sense is that this verse on its own - if you take it out of the context of the Sermon on the Mount, and if you divorce it from the context of everything else that the word of God teaches on prayer, you will misunderstand it. Let me say: it is not a blank cheque, it is not coming to God and asking Him for absolutely anything, it is not a magic wand that you can just quote, like 'Abracadabra', and put over your situation and everything's right and God makes everything hunky-dory. This verse, and indeed all verses in the word of God with regards to faith and prayer, must be understood in their biblical context - in chapter 7 of Matthew's gospel, and also in the wider context of the word of God.

It would do you well, if you're in the second category today, to go home and make a list of all of the teachings and instructions in the word of God with regards to prayer, and then start to ask is God answering prayer or not. It's very instructive, let me list a few them for you very quickly. Matthew 7:11, where we're reading, says that you've to ask for good gifts - good gifts. We don't have time today to look at what that means, but we will in the next week that we come to this. In chapter 2 and verse 21 we find that to do with collective prayer, where two agree together on the one thing. You go further in the word of God, Mark chapter 11, the Lord says if you ask and do not doubt - don't doubt. There the opposite is faith, and He says if you ask believing that you shall receive the things. So first of all we've got asking for good things, there's to be no doubt in your heart or in your mind, you're to believe that you will receive - Luke chapter 17 verse 6, faith as a grain of mustard seed. We find further that you're to ask in the name of the Lord Jesus, in other words asking as if the Lord Jesus Christ were asking. You've to ask with the right motive, in other words - John chapter 14 - that the Father may be glorified in the Son. John chapter 15, you're to abide in Christ, having fellowship with Christ, and His words are to abide in you - and then you shall ask and you shall receive. In verse 15 of John 15, the same passage on fruit and the vine, you're to ask in order to bring forth lasting fruit. Again the motivation: what are you asking these things for? Is it to bring forth lasting fruit? James 4, you're not to ask amiss, selfishly. James 5, you're to ask as a righteous man, the prayers of a righteous man avail much. You're to keep His commandments and to do those things that are pleasing in His sight, 1 John 3. You're to ask according to the will of God, 1 John 5:14.

Boy, what a list! I could go on, there are many other things - so don't just detract from this verse all that's in it without the rest of the word of God and the rest of this context. You may be experiencing at this moment unanswered prayer because, simply, of the ignorance of these other teachings in the word of God. But a common misunderstanding - and we don't have time to deal with it today - a common misunderstanding whereby people believe their prayers are not answered is not a misunderstanding about the works of prayer, but a misunderstanding about the God being prayed to. We'll leave that for the next week.

Let's bow our heads together. Maybe you're here and you've been praying and praying and praying for something, maybe you're here and there's sin between you and God and that's why God's not answering your prayers. Maybe it's a lack of persistence - I think I've said this to you before, I imagine if I could see a video clip of my life from God's perspective there have been times were I have almost been there in asking and getting what I've been seeking for, and I've just given up just that moment too early. Are you persisting? It may be that you're doing all those things - well, between now and the next fortnight of me doing the next stage, look in the word of God and search concerning what is said about prayer, but more than that: search

concerning what is said about the God answering prayer. Look at verses 7 to 11 again, and then come back and we'll finish it off.

Father, help us - in fact, teach us to pray. We feel so inadequate when it comes to this great Sermon of our Lord's, and it was the only one that we have recorded really that He preached - apart from the parables and so on. Yet it's enough to keep us going right into eternity, and we wonder how we could ever manage. But Lord, it is not in our power, but it is coming dependently and persistently in prayer and asking for these things, and asking for Thy help, and asking for the good things that Thou hast instructed us to do. Help those, Father, that are confused about prayer, and as they search the Scriptures we pray that Thy Holy Spirit will guide them and teach them and instruct them, even before they come back again to see what a great prayer-answering God Thou art. For we pray in the Saviour's precious name, Amen.

The Sermon On The Mount - Chapter 21

"Encouragement To Pray - Part 2"

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Matthew 7:7-12

Now we're turning again in our Bibles to Matthew's gospel chapter 7, Matthew chapter 7, and beginning to read at verse 7. Again I stress, I hope I don't need to any more, but for any newcomers here today, these are the words of none other than our Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Verse 7: "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him? Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets".

Let's bow our heads and humble our hearts momentarily before the Lord, and ask Him to really speak today through His word: Father, we thank Thee for the Spirit of God that was in Christ to inspire these words. We thank Thee, our Father, for their effectiveness in the life of the surrendered believer, as they receive with meekness the ingrafted word of God. Father, we pray in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, that there would be a word of power for each of us here today. Those of us who have been struggling many years with unanswered prayer, or seemingly unanswered prayer; those of us who seem not to ever break through in the realm of prayer, who do not understand it, who cannot make head nor tail of how and why and in what way God answers prayer. Father, we just seek Thy help, that all who are confused and bewildered may be put straight by the Spirit of God today, and that from this day there would be opened unto them an adventure of prayer in the life of the Spirit that they have not known hitherto. But Lord, I will not be able to do that, and so we pray that the Holy Spirit may come and minister, in Christ's name we pray, Amen.

In our last study, as we looked specifically at verses 7 and 8, we saw how in the realm of prayer generally there are three different types of Christian. The first type of Christian is the one who just doesn't pray at all - the one who knows perhaps that a Christian ought to pray, but doesn't lay much importance upon it, doesn't value it much, doesn't think that it does much, and therefore that equates to the absence of prayer within their life. The second group is a group of people who do believe in prayer and do pray, but they fumble at it, they stumble at prayer. In other words, they have what we could call a prayer life, but within their prayer life - whatever that consists of - they feel that all they know is failure and defeat, and a lack of answered prayer, and a lack of reality and vitality in what they call their prayer life. Then there is a third group, a very small group but yet a very real group, a group of people who do pray, do see answers to their prayer, do prove the promises and the precepts of God on their knees, and can declare the power - the supernatural power of God in prayer.

Now, I want to address the second group - because I cannot help the first group. If you don't want to pray, there's nothing I can do for you. You're missing out on the blessings, all of the blessings of the Christian life - and if you do not pray, or you do not store any value in prayer, you are the one who is losing out and I cannot do anything for you. If you're in the third group - and there are some individuals, men and women in this assembly, who I would say are in the third category - who are daily, every day in experience, proving God through prayer: claiming God's promises, seeing the answers to God's promises in their prayers - and praise the Lord for you, and I value you, and I value your prayers.

But whom I really feel sorry for are those in the second group who do pray, who do wrestle with God, who do seek God's face, but it seems to them that God is not answering my prayers! I have had experience, pastorally, in recent days of people who have come to me in tears telling me that God is not answering their prayers. This is a real problem, and it is very wrong for us to belittle it in any way or patronise these people. These people day by day, and Sunday after Sunday, and right throughout their life hear men and women preaching about how God always answers prayer - He always answers prayer! Now I'm not sure that's true, in fact I believe it's not true. I do not believe that God always answers prayer, but that's the way things seem to be in people's ears. They read books on prayer, they hear of great prayer warriors of the past whom God moved through, and those books - biographical books - are telling you and me that we ought to have the prayer lives that they had, and we ought to see the answers in prayer that they saw, but God doesn't seem to answer you! God doesn't seem to be that real to you!

Now if there's a need for anything in Christendom today, and especially in evangelicalism and conservative evangelicalism, it is the need for honesty and the need for realism! Where we are not trying to portray ourselves hypocritically as something that we are not, that if God is not answering our prayers that we are honest about it, and that we admit it, and we seek through the word of God to have Holy Spirit surgery upon our life - and our prayer life specifically - and have the problem answered. The fact of the matter is, for most of you including myself, there are times when prayer does not turn out the way that I would like it to. Am I speaking to you this morning?

There was once a man who was pursued by a roaring hungry lion. As that lion was sprinting after him, he felt the hot breath upon the back of his neck - and he knew that his time was short. So he fell on his knees and he prayed to God, and he cried out in desperation: 'Lord, make this lion a Christian!'. Of course, as he finished his prayer he turned round, and lo and behold the lion was on his knees praying! The lips were moving, and he thought: 'What a tremendous answer to prayer' - and he was so encouraged by God's supernatural power that he went over to the lion to join him in fellowship. As he was kneeling down he heard the lion praying: 'For what we are about to receive, may the Lord make us truly thankful'!

His prayer was not answered - it was answered, but it was not answered in the way that he wanted it to be. Now there are a number of reasons, and we covered them recently in our study, and I just want to recap over them. The first, it's not really the first but it's an obvious one: if you are not saved today don't be expecting God to answer your prayers. The only prayer that God wants to hear, I'm not saying He will not answer your prayers, but the only prayer that is your priority - number one on your list - is: 'Lord, be merciful unto me, a sinner'. If you want a prayer life you ought to start with that prayer. Then for those who are saved, the first reason can often be a lack of dependence on God. Verse 7 begins: 'Ask, and it shall be given unto you', and we've looked in recent weeks at how 'ask' is the prime evidence of absolute and total dependence upon God. If we're asking of another it is an indication that we need that other person and that we are putting all of our weight and dependence upon them. If you have a lack of dependence of God, you will not have your prayers answered. Second, if there is broken fellowship between you and God your prayers will not be answered - 'If I regard iniquity in my heart the Lord will not hear me'. One of the greatest reasons why people do not have a prayer life and their prayer is not answered, is because something has come between them and God, and that something is always sin. What is more important than getting something from God, is getting into fellowship with God.

Thirdly, there can be a lack of persistence in our prayers. Insistence, perseverance - and we saw that in verse 7 and verse 8, that ask, seek, and knock are all progressive. If you don't get when you ask, you maybe ask again; and if you still don't get then you start to seek; and after seeking, if you have not received, then you start to knock. Each one is a step nearer to God, seeking God - you remember the illustration I used about needing your neighbour, and calling over the garden fence: 'Can you help me?'. There's no answer, and you call again, and you still get no answer so you go round and look for him around the house and in the garden, and you don't find him so then you go to the door and you knock and you knock and you knock until he

comes out, until he answers. There's a progression, each action: ask, seek, knock is an extra step further on than the previous one - it's an increasing eagerness and earnestness.

We looked into the original Greek language and we saw how the tense literally means this, we could translate it: 'Keep on asking, keep on seeking, keep on knocking'. One of the reasons why believer's prayers are not answered is because they do not keep on asking, seeking, and knocking. Then fourthly, and this is what we want to deal with today, this perhaps is one of the most common: it is simply misunderstanding of prayer, and a misunderstanding of God. What do I mean? Well, when you ask the question: 'Why does God not hear me? I'm depending upon Him, God knows my dependence upon Him. I haven't broken fellowship, I've confessed all my sin as far as I know, and I've been praying for maybe 30 years about this thing. Why has God not answered me?'. The problem, probably, for you is perhaps a misunderstanding of who God is and of what prayer is meant to bring to you. One commentator I shared with you the last week, he calls these verses 'Verses that have deceptive simplicity' - not in any way that the Lord is deceiving, but in the verses there's a kind of vagueness if we take them on their own. You remember that I taught you in the last study that we're meant to take these verses in conjunction with the verses around them in the Sermon on the Mount - we're asking, seeking, knocking for the attributes that God has been preaching about through His Son, that ought to be in the life of the believer. We must take them in the context of all the other teaching, verses and chapters and portions and parables on prayer right throughout the whole Bible.

Maybe that's your misunderstanding, but my friend even if you do understand all that, it could be that you're still in the condition where you feel that God is not answering your prayers. One of the common reasons that the Lord is illustrating, I believe, here is a misunderstanding not simply of prayer, but a misunderstanding of the God of prayer. We looked at the works of prayer: asking, seeking, knocking - and that's our side, the asking part. But this week we're going to look at the Father's side, which is the giving part. Really verses 9 to 11 is our study today. Verses 9 and 10 tell us this: in nature all men, all animals and birds, are made so that in nature they instinctively provide the right kind of food for their children. Look at verse 9: 'What man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent?'. It's natural for animals, beasts, birds of the air, the fish of the sea to instinctively provide the right kind of food for their children. If you're familiar with Matthew's gospel you will note that the bread and the fish probably point forward to Matthew's gospel chapter 14, where the Lord feeds the 5000 with loaves of bread and with fish, and what the Lord is saying here is: 'The Lord provides exactly what men and women need, as He provided the manna from heaven in the wilderness for the children of Israel, as He provided the fish and the loaves for the 5000, God will always provide what His children need'.

Now what today is your picture of God? What is your caricature of God with regards to prayer? Do you see Him as a despot, like some judge sitting upon a throne who extracts malice and malicious sadistic glee from you squirming in your problems and perplexities, in your suffering, in your unanswered prayer? Do you see God up there with a clenched fist, and you have to take the crowbar of intercession and try to open it up so that the sweets of blessing come down to you on earth? Is that the way you see God? For if you see God like that, I would say to you today that that could be part of the problem that your prayers are not answered. What this passage is teaching us, above anything else, is what the Father's heart is toward His children - the way He thinks toward us, the way He works for us. The Lord is saying, listen: 'God always gives good things to His children!' Have you got that? God always gives good things to His children! There is a great storehouse in heaven, a vast repository more than sufficient for all our needs and all our requirements - and God always gives good things!

It's difficult, isn't it? You might be sitting here today saying: 'Well, God must have made a mistake with me somewhere along the way, because it wasn't a good thing I got - in fact, I didn't get anything I asked for. I've been praying and I still haven't got this and the good things that I want. It's only good things I want, my desires are His desires - it's that my family may be saved, it's that these problems of illness and sickness and

mental problems and social problems and relational problems in my life should be done away with. That's all I'm looking!'. Let me give you three thoughts from this passage that I hope, and have been praying deeply, will help you today. The first is this: these verses tell us that God will always give you your basic needs - God will always give you your basic needs. Now the little quip that is very worn is: 'He gives us our needs and not our greeds' - and that is true. He will always give us what we need - the reason being that bread and fish are the basic staple diet of people in Palestinian days in which we're reading. God was giving them, He's saying: 'I give you what you need'.

In Luke chapter 11 where the Lord tells this story again, He talks of eggs - so He's speaking of bread, fish, and eggs: staples of diet. He is saying that He is able always to give us everyday needs that we have, and that is why in chapter 6 and in verse 11 what does He instruct us to pray? 'Give us this day our daily bread'. Whether it is physical needs or spiritual needs, listen child today: God always gives you your needs - always! The second thing: God always gives you good things, that's what this passage is teaching. God not only gives you your needs - your need might be the dentist, and I don't particularly like the dentist - but He always gives you good things. In other words, the antithesis is that there is no bad thing in stock in God's cupboards! He has never ever given a bad thing to any of His children. Everything He does by way of answering their prayers is always good: His giving is good. We struggle with this, it's so difficult - He withholds no good from us, and if He withholds anything from us He only withholds that which is bad, not that which is good. Now here is the reasoning - again it's this argument: 'If you do this, how much more does your heavenly Father', do you remember that argument? If you do this, how much more does your heavenly Father? He says to you: 'Right, you know how to give good gifts to your children. Look at you! You're a sinful, depraved, hell-deserving sinner, the wrath of God was abiding on you before conversion, and even before conversion you knew how to give good gifts to your children. You would give him bread if he asked you for bread, you wouldn't give him a stone, you would give him bread. If he asked you for fish, you wouldn't give him some kind of a water serpent - an eel - you would give him a fish. If he asked for an egg, you wouldn't give him a scorpion, you would give him an egg'. Do you see His reasoning?

Now watch: the bread in Palestine was like a flat stone, so there's a similarity here between the bread and the stone. In fact, that's why the devil in Matthew's gospel tempted the Lord to turn stones into bread - the stones looked like bread, and he was tempting Him using the eye-gate, what looked like bread to turn it to bread. The serpents here are water serpents as I've said, water snakes that fishermen used to find when they brought the catch in caught in amongst the nets - probably like what we know as an eel - but the point of it is this: an eel or a water snake was unclean in the ceremonial law, Leviticus 11. It had no gills, it had no fins, it was unclean. When you ask God for something that is holy, He's not going to give you something that is unclean. In Luke chapter 11 where He mentions an egg - now watch, this is a difficult one, how's he going to get the association between an egg and a scorpion? Well believe it or not, the scorpions in Palestine were of a light colour and they used to roll together into the shape of an egg! But they were dangerous, as you well know - and if you ask your father for an egg, he's not going to hand you...'There you go son, there's an egg'...a scorpion.

Now what is the Lord saying? Well people have interpreted this passage as meaning: 'Well, if you ask for an egg God will give you an egg. If you ask for bread, He'll give you bread. If you ask for a fish, He'll give you fish'. That is not what this passage teaches, it is not! What it does teach is that God's wisdom is greater than our wisdom. God's wisdom is always greater than our wisdom! There are things that we think in life are good, and there are things that we think are not good - we want the things that we think are good, and we don't want the things that we think are not good - but what this is teaching us is this: God is not just willing to give us things, but He is wise to give us the right thing! Do you see the difference? It's not some supernatural shopping list: 'Lord, I want a piece of bread' - bang, bread! Abracadabra! 'Lord, I want a fish' - bang, fish! That's not what this is, it's telling us that when we come to God, God is wise enough to tell us what we need and to give us what we need.

Am I doing exegetical somersaults today? I don't believe I am. The very fact is: you don't always get what you ask for, but God's word says you always get what you need. How many times have you heard of a person who has been praying to be healed, or for another to be healed, and they believed - they truly believed - that they would be healed? Some real giants of God, but they were almost plunged into atheism and agnosticism because it seemed that God had failed them. God had not failed them! They had misunderstood God's word! We in measure, Jesus says, know how to answer our children - 'we in measure', the emphasis is on us, not on the getting but on the giving. 'We in measure know how to give to our children, how much more does your heavenly Father know, in wisdom, how to give to you?'. A mother thinks that a dose of medicine is good for her child, and the child thinks otherwise and spits it all round her - but mother knows best, doesn't she? It's not just the giving of the thing, there's the opposite, many a young life has been absolutely wrecked because of the indulgence of their parents upon them - giving everything that they wanted to them! Yet, which of you wouldn't hold something back that would harm your child? The wisdom is with you, and the wisdom is with God! How much more is it with God if you've got it?

What am I saying? I'm saying this: you look into your past today, scan your biographical history with the Lord, and I think that you could praise the Lord more perhaps for some of His unanswered prayers than some that have been miraculously answered - I can say that. It's hard, perhaps, where you are today to say it, when you're looking for God to really come through for some reason - but what God's wanting you to do is to trust Him, that He is wise enough to give you what is good! I've been really touched in this week by two poems. I love poetry, but not all poetry, I like good poetry - good poetry is not good in a language sense, but that which touches the heart, to me that's good poetry. There is a poem by Ruth Harms-Calkin in a book entitled: 'Tell Me Again Lord, I Forget' - it's a good title for a book, we need to be reminded of a great deal of things. Listen to what she says, the poem is called: 'Thank You for Saying No', listen:

"Lord, day after day I've thanked You for saying 'Yes',
But when have I genuinely thanked You for saying 'No'?
Yet I shudder to think of the possible smears,
The cumulative blots on my life,
Had You not been sufficiently wise
To say an unalterable 'No'!

So thank You for saying 'No',
When my want list for things
Far exceeded my longing for You,
When I asked for a stone -
Foolishly certain that I asked for bread.

Thank You for saying 'No' -
To my petulant 'Just this time, Lord'.
Thank You for saying 'No' -
To senseless excuses, selfish motives, dangerous diversions.
Thank You for saying 'No' -
When the temptation that enticed me would have bound me beyond escape.
Thank You for saying 'No' -
When I asked You to leave me alone.

But above all, thank You for saying 'No',
When in anguish I asked:
'Lord, if you give all else may I keep this?'.
Lord, my awe increases
When I see the wisdom of Your divine 'No'".

I don't know whether you know this, but the mother of St. Augustine prayed with desperate earnestness that her son might be converted and that he might not go to Italy where he wanted to go to live his life of sin. The fact of the matter is, if you read his life story, she felt Italy would be the ruin of him, but in Italy he found Christ! God said 'No' - are you going to argue that in God saying 'No', that He wasn't giving something good to His child - of course He was! Things may come into our lives, and into your life specifically, and they're from the hand of God and it seems that it's not good - but you need to realise today that your heavenly Father never ever makes a mistake, and we quote it over and over again but we've got to say it again: 'We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose'. What we also need to realise is that in the Authorised Version that we love there are two words for 'good' in the Greek that are just translated 'good' in English, but they're different words. The first word means 'things that are intrinsically good' - they might not look good, but deep down they're for a good purpose. That's the first word, the second word means 'obvious good', it's in chapter 5:16: 'The people will praise the Lord for your good works'. Obviously good if you help an old lady across the road, that's good - but there may be things coming into your life that mean the first word, that are intrinsically good and God has meant them for good, but they can only be seen as evil. The first word is the word here: 'He will always give good things' - have you got it? That's the word: intrinsically good, they mightn't look good, they mightn't feel good, they mightn't seem good, but they are good!

He does not always give us what we ask, He always gives us something better! Do you believe that? Always something better! The second poem that blessed me was by an old confederate soldier in the American Civil War. Listen to this:

"I asked God for strength, that I might achieve,
And I was made weak, that I may learn to humbly obey.

I asked God for health, that I may do greater things.
I was given infirmity, that I might do better things.

I asked for riches, that I may be happy.
And I was given poverty, that I might be wise.

I asked for power, that I might have the praise of men.
I was given weakness, that I might feel the need of God.

I asked for all things, that I might enjoy life.
And I was given life, that I might enjoy all things!"

Listen:

"I got nothing I asked for - but everything I hoped for,
And I am, among all men, most richly blessed!"

And he got nothing he asked for! Thirdly, we don't have time to deal with it but He will always give you the things of the Spirit. In Luke chapter 11, in the parallel passage, he talks about how the Lord will give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him, and in fact what you need to realise is that every saint of God - if they're genuinely saved - has the Holy Spirit. Even the carnal Corinthians were told: 'The Holy Ghost is in you'. In the original language, in the Greek, there is no definite article. Our translation says: 'He will give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him', but in the Greek there is no 'the'. Whenever there is no 'the' in the Greek it usually speaks of the things of the Holy Spirit, the gifts of the Holy Spirit, the operations on our behalf of the Holy Spirit. It makes sense here, and the promise is that God will give us all that He knows we need, He will always give us good things whether they seem good or not, and thirdly He will always give us the things of the Holy Spirit. What that means in this context is simply this: we've been taught to love our enemies, love

our neighbours, do good to them that curse us, and all these great commands that we've been thinking: 'How on earth can I keep them?' - here is the answer: the love God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost who is given unto us! You feel helpless at the end of this sermon - hallelujah! Come to God and ask, seek, and knock.

It is the case with many of us that we have not because we ask not, or we ask but we ask amiss that we may consume it upon our lusts. But there are people here and they have a great need, and they've prayed for that need for many a year - can I tell you today: Paul says, and he's always said it, but let me say it again: 'My God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory'. Your need is great, but what you've got to see is your need in relation to other things - the other great things in that verse: 'My God', 'according to His riches'. I can't diminish your need, because your need is great, but your God is greater! His provision is greater, and if you come with the keys of prayer and ask, and seek, and knock, the heart of God will give you what you need! Can a woman forget her suckling child that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget, yet God says: 'I will not forget thee'.

Maybe your prayer life is in tatters because you have misunderstood the God of prayer. No wonder John Newton said:

'Come, my soul, thy suit prepare:
Jesus loves to answer prayer;
He himself has bid thee pray,
Therefore will not say thee nay.

Thou art coming to a King,
Large petitions with thee bring;
For His grace and power are such,
None can ever ask too much'.

Let us bow our heads before the God who knows all men's hearts, and knows how many answered prayers you've had in the last month. Maybe they have been answered, maybe you just didn't want the answer. What's it all about? It's all about this, I think this is the answer to every question perhaps in the Christian life that can come: 'All to Jesus I surrender'...

'Lord, I come to Thee for rest,
Take possession of my breast;
There Thy blood bought right maintain,
And without a rival reign'.

It means this: whatever comes from the hand of God, you take it from His hand as good things for you.

Father, we love Thee and we know that Thou dost love us. How could we ever doubt it when we hear the words of Thy Son, that Thou wilt always give good gifts? Maybe not what we want, perhaps not what seems good externally, but what the Great Physician in heaven knows is for our good. Lord, help us to cast everything upon Thee, for we know this day that Thou dost care for us. In the lovely name of the Saviour we ask Thee to help us live according to Thy word, Amen.

The Sermon On The Mount - Chapter 22

"Sanctified Selfishness: The Paralysis of Legalism"

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Matthew 7:12

Now we've been going through the Sermon on the Mount for several weeks now, we've reached our twenty-second study this morning, and we're looking at what is commonly called: 'The Golden Rule', which is found in verse 12 of chapter 7. Now it's only one verse, a few words perhaps within the verse, it's certainly not the longest verse in the Bible, but it perhaps is one of the most famous verses in the Bible and it holds within it a great deal of spiritual truth. For that reason I found myself, as I studied it this week, realising that there's far too much in this one verse just to squeeze in in one particular week. So, God willing, I hope to split our study of this one verse into two weeks, and I've entitled it 'Sanctified Selfishness', sanctified selfishness.

The first study that we're looking at today is: 'The Paralysis of Legalism' - the paralysis of legalism. Verse 12 of chapter 7, the Lord Jesus again says: 'Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets'.

This verse has been described, by one scholar at least, as the Everest of ethics, the highest point of moral teaching of the Lord Jesus, and indeed perhaps right throughout the whole of holy Scripture. He goes on to say that it is the Everest of ethics because with this commandment the Sermon on the Mount reaches its summit and its peak. I've said already that it's probably the most famous statement that the Lord Jesus Christ ever made, and it certainly is the statement that at least the world around us that are not Christian would recognise as being from His sacred lips. It's probably the one that all Christians and believers in our Lord Jesus and disciples of His are judged by by the world around us. It's the greatest statement, many would say, that has ever been made - and both the world and the church would commend it as the Everest of ethics.

Of course it's ironic that even people in our world today would say that it's the greatest statement ever made, but they don't practise it. The governments of our world don't practise it. In everyday life of our neighbours and our friends in the workplace, it is not practiced - and sadly to say, even though we disciples of the Lord Jesus commend these golden words, we ourselves do not keep them. It's worthy of saying at this stage in our study of the Sermon on the Mount, as we have looked exegetically from verse to verse and statement to statement, and as we have weighed them up theologically and practically, this Sermon is not for our comment, it's not for us to take a part and dislocate and analyse, but there's something further that we've got to do with it: we've got to carry it out! Not just commend these great words that the Lord is speaking, but we've to take them into our lives and practically fulfil them.

Now let's remind ourselves of what the Lord has said already in this Sermon. At the end of our text He says this, that to do unto others as you would want them to do unto you is to fulfil the law and the prophets. Now let's look back for a moment at chapter 5 and verse 17 to remember what the Lord Jesus said. Remember that the Pharisees, and the Scribes, and the lawyers were accusing Him of destroying the law of God, the law of Moses. But the Lord lays down right at the very beginning of His Sermon that that is not what He has come into the world to do, He has a reverence and a respect for the law of Moses. We've seen already going through this Sermon how He takes each specific part of the law of Moses and He, not reinterprets it, but He

brings us a fulfilment and a completion of it. 'Think not', 5 verse 17, 'that I am come to destroy', or abolish, 'the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil'. 'I'm not come to abolish but to fill up, to bring to completion and perfection the law of God'.

Now He says that to do unto others as you would have them do unto yourself is a complete summary and fulfilment of the law and the prophets. Now I want you to see what He is actually saying at the very outset of our sermon. He is saying: 'Look, you Pharisees and Scribes that are listening in the surrounding circumference of this gathering; you, My disciples, that are the very crux of this ministry, I'm pointing it towards you specifically: if you want to fulfil every jot and tittle of the law of God in the Old Testament, you've got to do this: do unto others as you would have them do unto you'. If you want to fulfil the law, this is how you do it, this is a practical and a personal fulfilment of everything that God has given to us through Moses. This is the way to do it, not making traditions of men, not making 600 plus laws added to the Pentateuch - the first five books of the Bible - that burden men and women down every day of life, that's not the way to do it. This is the way to do it, not the way the Pharisees have been telling you to do it, do not follow the Pharisees' example.

Of course, we have alluded to this right throughout this Sermon, what was the Pharisees' example? What was the essence of Pharisaism and what we're looking at today, legalism? It was only an outward conformity to the law of God, it was an outward conformity to the added laws and rules and regulations that were man-made, but Jesus is saying: 'That is not true righteousness. If you want your righteousness to exceed the standard of the righteousness of the Pharisees, you must do unto your neighbour, to strangers, as you would have them do unto you, for this is a fulfilment of the law and the prophets'.

We have noted time after time after time again how the Lord Jesus in this Sermon just comes in, and He turns everything that the world knows to be truth on its head. His teaching of righteousness and of godliness seems always to be the absolute opposite of what the world sees, the absolute opposite of the philosophy of the world system and even the religious systems of the world, it's the antithesis of it! Now if you were to define for us, today, selfishness as wanting everybody around you and everybody that you know to provide only for yourself, regardless of their needs or the needs of others, we find that the Lord's teaching here is turning selfishness on its head - it's the exact opposite! It's a reverse selfishness. Rather than wanting everybody to provide and look after you at their expense, the Lord is saying: 'True righteousness is to look after everybody else as you would want them to look after you'.

I've called it a 'sanctified selfishness' - that which you would selfishly want people to indulge upon yourself, you do that for others. Think about selfishness for a moment, and what selfishness is in your life, as I know it is to be in mine. Our selfishness usually breaks out into injury of our neighbours. Selfishness is usually giving to the seed of theft, slander, lying, murder, adultery, fornication, cursing, quarrels, wars - we could go on and on and on, and we find that the root of all these problems is pride and often selfish pride. But the Lord is saying: 'Now, I'm calling you to take that selfishness and put benevolence through it, that all the things that you would want people to do for you, that so often makes you sin toward others, take that selfishness and sanctify it'. Now, do it just for a moment and you'll see that this is exactly what the Lord is saying.

Conjure up in your mind for a moment what you would love someone to do for you. Now I'm not talking about fantasizing, or ridiculous dreams or aspirations, but I'm thinking of everyday practical realities that you would like people to show towards you - whether it be courtesy, or politeness, or kindness - you can think of them, realistically and practically how you would like people to behave towards you. Can you think of it? Sure you can! I'm sure you've even gone through life complaining about the way that people have treated you, and they ought not to have treated you that way - but isn't it ironic, as we look at the Pharisees, we look at the disciples, we look at the Lord Jesus' teaching, and then we look at ourselves, that perhaps those who continually the most find fault in the actions and ways of others and how they behave towards us are the ones who don't have the first notion how to behave toward others! Isn't that often the way it is?

The ones who complain the most, the ones who gripe the most, who groan the most, that irritate the most, are the ones who do not know how to behave toward others the most. Sadly to say, I think that the philosophy of the world has infiltrated into the church. Their philosophy today is 'dog eat dog', do it to others before they do it to you. It is 'give as good as you get', but the Lord's teaching is that you should behave toward others as you would like them to behave toward you. The way people behave towards you is not a gauge as to how you should treat them - if they're nasty to you, well then they deserve to have a nasty comment made toward them. Whatever they do to you is a measurement of how you should do it to them - the Lord says that is not the measurement of how you should behave, but rather you should treat them as you think they should have treated you.

Now let's pause for a moment and ask ourselves honestly the question: is this the way we really behave? Do we practice this verse? And if this is the verse that the world, perhaps, stamps on us as what should be the caricature of a Christian - do they see it in us, and how do we live up to their expectations? The Lord is saying: 'The best life, the life that I want you to live, and a life that would be an absolute complete fulfilment of the holy scriptures, is not a life of Pharisaism'. Godliness is not a strict adherence to religious dogma and rules, but it is a life of devotion to God and a life of devotion toward others. In other words, the best life is a life of love. We don't have time to look at 1 Corinthians 13, but when you do get time I would urge you to go and look at it and see how, if you can do all sorts of great spiritual things but do not have love, it is nothing.

Many scholars have argued that this 'golden rule' is not original. You will know that right throughout this Sermon the Lord has been lifting statements from the law of God, and scholars say: 'Well, He's just lifted a statement that was made hundreds of years before Christ ever lived, and He has put His own stamp of authority upon it'. If you look not too closely you'll find that that, perhaps, is correct - because hundreds of years before the Lord Jesus, Confucius, a Chinese sage, said these words: 'Do not to others what you would not like them to do to you'. If you want to look at the Jewishness of the Sermon on the Mount you find that Rabbi Hillel, that we looked to as we looked at the subject of divorce, he also said something similar a hundred years before the Lord Jesus was born, he said: 'What is hateful to you do not to your fellow creatures, that is the whole law, all else is explanation'. You can go to the Greeks, you can go to the Romans, you can go to some of the major religions of our world even that we have today, and there are similar statements like these - but what I want you to see today is that the Lord Jesus Christ's statement has a world of difference in it!

Confucius, Rabbi Hillel, all of the other statements within all the other religions and cults of the world, have this statement in the negative form. Listen: 'Do not do to others what you would not like them to do to you', but what is the Lord's statement? 'Do unto others as you would have them do unto you'. If anything, the Lord may well lift these statements that have been made by men before Him, but you can see what He does again - He turns it on its head, and He turns it into the true living righteousness of a holy God. There's a vast difference, for all of these other statements are negative, but our Master's statement is positive. All the other statements are only human advice, where our Master's statement is a very manifestation of divine love in His life and in the life of His disciples. Only the Lord Jesus Christ, in all the history of humanity, has put this statement in its positive form.

Incidentally, we should pause and see how Pharisaical religion has the canny knack of presenting what appears to be truth, but when we probe and analyse deeper and deeper we find that something fundamental is omitted. Do you see it? If you read the statement of the Pharisees, and the rabbis, and Confucius, and put the Lord's statement beside it you would think there's nothing different - but there is a world of difference! One is negative and one is positive, and let me say to you today that that is the fundamental difference between true godly faith and Pharisaism! One is negative, but the other is positive. Let me explain what I mean, and in explaining remind you that almost certainly legalism is the dragon that the Lord Jesus Christ is seeking to slay in His Sermon on the Mount. Let me read you a statement by S. Lewis Johnson that some of you may be

familiar with, some of his tapes are available even in our tape ministry here in the hall. He said in an article entitled 'The Paralysis of Legalism', listen: 'Legalism is one of the most serious problems facing orthodox Christianity today. It wrenches the joy of the Lord from the believer, and with the joy of the Lord goes His power for vital worship and vibrant service. Nothing is left but cramped, sombre, dull and listless profession. The truth is betrayed and the glorious name of the Lord becomes a synonym for a gloomy killjoy. The Christian under law is a miserable parody of the real thing'.

What is legalism? As we have been going through this Sermon I have been alluding to it and the characteristics of it, but I haven't really stopped and paused and taken a clear and definite look at it, and I want to do this this morning in the time that is left simply because it is the opposite of the positivity that we have in this text, chapter 7 and verse 12. There are three things quickly that I could say about legalism. First of all legalism could be defined as putting adherence to the letter of the law, what is written in the word of God, but ignoring or looking over the spirit, the devotional spirit and point that is behind the word of God - the reason why these words have been written. Adhering to each little jot and title, each little word and verse, but forgetting the sentiment and the meaning behind what is written. Secondly, legalism could be defined as not just doing what I've said there, but doing it with a view to getting credit with God - thinking that God will smile on you, that you will be more accepted with God because of your legalistic adherence to the word of God. But there's a third thing, and this is really what defines legalism: not only is it looking at the word of God and taking the letter of the law over the spirit; not only is it thinking that you're, in the eyes of God, better than other Christians because of it; but it goes a step further to want to enforce upon everybody else the rules and the regulations that you see as correct. That, perhaps above them all, is the defining mark of legalism.

Let me show you, illustrating from the word of God, three ways that we see legalism. The first is found in 1 Corinthians 8, you don't need to turn to it, but you will remember that Paul there is writing to the church at Corinth and there is a bit of a dispute going on because some people were eating meat that was sacrificed to an idol, a foreign god. There were some people who, Paul says, had a weak conscience, who thought that this was wrong, but they went a step further and they said that it was sin - 'They ought not to eat of that meat because it was offered to an idol' - and Paul says: 'Look, the kingdom of God has got nothing to do with eating and drinking, the kingdom of God is spiritual and to do with love and joy and peace'. And we see there the mark of legalism, one of the marks of legalism, is a weak conscience that makes matters that are morally indifferent sin - the traditions and the rules of men. Paul was saying that this meat offered to idols, it was not a sin to eat it - but because of the weak conscience of the people that thought it was a sin, he told the Christians to abstain from it. But don't miss the point: they were abstaining from it because of the weaker conscience of their brethren and sisters.

So legalism can be marked, first all, by a weak conscience. Secondly it's marked in the Scriptures by an excessive emphasis on what is forbidden in the law, rather than what is enjoined in the law. In other words, it emphasises the negative rather than the positive. We don't have time to look into that, but you can look into that in your own private study. But the third thing that we see in the very person of our Lord Jesus and in His teaching is that legalism has a lack of balance within it. It never emphasises what is important, but at the expense of what is important it emphasises the less important. Let me illustrate that for you, turn to Matthew chapter 23 for a moment and verse 23, and it's a good exercise to go down this passage and circle all the woes that the Lord Jesus speaks. He's castigating the Pharisees: 'Woe unto you ye blind guides, woe unto Scribes and Pharisees, woe unto you ye hypocrites'. And then in verse 23: 'Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone'.

Characteristic of legalism is that it hones in and emphasises less important things at the expense of the most important things, the weightier spiritual matters are neglected. I couldn't give you a better definition of this

aspect of legalism than our brother Gordon Cardwell did when he was with us on the Friday evening of our Easter Convention. This is what he said, I remind you: 'Legalism is: what God puts at the top we put at the bottom, and what He puts to the bottom we put to the top'. It is my personal conviction that for too long evangelical Christianity has been expressed in the negative, rather than in the positive - don't drink, don't smoke, don't go to the dances, don't do the pools, don't do the lottery - and all these things may well be sinful, but is that the way that the Lord encourages us to define our faith? We may not do these things, but if you were to come to the Lord Jesus Christ and ask Him for a true definition of Christianity you will find, and we have found, that that definition is in the positive: do unto others. He didn't take up Rabbi Hillel's statement, or Confucius' statement, or any of the other statements of the world religions - 'Do not do unto others as you would not have them do to you', but 'Do', positive!

Why is it that so often we define our Christianity and portray it as negative? Have you ever wondered why we do that? I wonder is it because it's easier to be negative than to be positive? It costs less of us, because when we lay our life down for others then we fulfil Matthew 7 and verse 12, and it's hard to do that - it means a death to self. You're going out of your way to help others. It's perfectly - if you think about it - feasible for anybody in the world to adhere to a negative version of this verse, and people in the world do do it. They're neighbourly, they're humanist, they're moralist and they don't do to others as they wouldn't like somebody to do to them - but to go a step further is divine! To go a step further you need to have the life of the living Almighty God in your very life. Of course, we don't want and we ought not to try to make Christianity attractive at the expense of truth - I hope you would agree with me there, that we ought not to try to go out of our way to make Christianity attractive and set aside the truths of the word of God, but I hope that you'll go with me a little bit further and say: 'Neither should we try to make Christianity unattractive at the expense of truth'!

I wonder at times do we do that? If there's anything that our verse tells us today it's this: true Christianity ought to be primarily defined positively. Do you agree? I'll be honest with you, I meet some so-called Christians, and if I wasn't a Christian I certainly wouldn't want to be a Christian after meeting them! As one man rightly said: 'To dwell above with saints we love, that will be grace and glory, but to live below with saints we know - well, that's another story!' I read a story this week of a father who was in his study reading, and he heard a commotion outside the window - it was his daughter who was playing with her friends. It that louder and louder and louder, and more heated and more argumentative, until finally he could stand it no longer - he pushed open the window and said: 'Stop it darling! What's going on?'. After the reprimand, after a few minutes she responded: 'Daddy, we were only playing church'. In the eyes of the world we as evangelicals, and even conservative evangelicals, are seen for our negative precepts rather than the positive life of God that is flowing out of our lives to the lives of those around whom we touch.

Now listen and see what you think of this, and perhaps this will be a test of whether you're a legalist or not. One preacher, around 1928, says these words: 'I led a Bible Conference at Montrose, Pennsylvania for about 200 young people and a few older people. On one of those days two old ladies complained that some of the girls' - mark this - 'were not wearing stockings. These ladies wanted me to rebuke them, but looking them straight in the eyes I said 'The Virgin Mary never wore stockings'. They gasped and said 'She didn't?'. I answered 'In Mary's times stockings were unknown, so far as we know they were first worn by prostitutes in Italy in the 15th-century when the Renaissance began. Later a lady of nobility scandalised the people by wearing stockings at a court ball, and before long everyone in the upper classes was wearing stockings, and by Queen Victoria's time stockings had become the badge of Victorian prude'. These ladies were, it seemed, struck by the forcibleness of my argument, and indeed I think stuck in the Victorian epoch. They had no more to say, I did not rebuke the girls for not wearing the stockings, and a year or two afterward most of the girls in the United States were going without stockings in the summer and nobody thought anything about it. Nor do I believe that this led toward the disintegration of moral standards in the United States, times were changing and to step away from Victorian legalism was all for the better'. Now, who said that? Was it a

minister from the Church of England? Was it an apostate? It was Donald Gray Barnhouse, many of you read his books. I wonder if I had said it what would have happened to me?

One preacher said recently, and it made me think: 'I agreed with a statement that a man made, until I heard who made it'. Are we legalists? I think at times we are, I think at times I am, and I have been. We have our own form of legalism, and it's simply this - now, please listen to me today - it is an attitude that writes off all other believers who do not dot our i's and cross our t's. 'If you're not my denomination you're not worth your salt. If you do not read my version of the Bible you don't really have the Bible. If you don't sing Psalms you don't praise God. If you only sing Psalms you're not praising God by spiritual songs. If you are Reformed, or if you are Armenian, if you are pre-, post-, or a-millennial' - now let me say that all of these things are not unimportant, and you know better than I do from my preaching what I believe about these things - and I strongly believe them! But legalism is the step where you say that people are not worth anything because they do not believe what you believe!

Are we? What do we make of Paul's words in Romans 14: 'The kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness, peace, joy in the Holy Ghost'. Colossians 2:16: 'Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of sabbaths'. Let me express to you a personal story, and I want to carry on five or so minutes so make yourself comfortable. I was in a church recently ministering the word of God in the morning, and after preaching a man came up to me and gave me his phone number and said: 'Look, I want to help you as much as I can in any way' - that doesn't happen too often! After that I put the little number in my Bible and went away, and then I came back in the evening to preach. As is my custom at times before preaching the Gospel, I prayed, and in my praying - even unconsciously - I asked the Holy Spirit to bless the meeting and to bless the preaching that went forth. I preached the word - I thought I did it quite well - and came down to the door. As I was shaking hands with the people this one individual who gave me his phone number in the morning stopped, pointedly looked at me, and said: 'You don't pray to the Holy Spirit do you?'. I had to think...well, I did there...so that must mean I do...oh! I watched myself tumble off his pedestal, and then he said a remarkable thing to me: 'I teach my children not to pray to the Holy Spirit, and you would have confused them this evening'. Now I believe that we should pray to the Father through Jesus the Son, and that is the norm - but if we say that we cannot pray to God the Holy Spirit, I think we've gone into the step of legalism.

I want to say publicly today, with all that I can muster up in my being, I renounce and denounce legalism full-stop! I say with Paul that we have been made ministers, able ministers of the New Testament, not of the letter but of the spirit, for the letter kills but the spirit makes alive. I can testify that there were times in my life when legalism made me feel secure, but now I can honestly say to you today that it makes me sick! I think that we today are in the age of Laodicean liberal lukewarmness, yes, but we could also be in the age of Laodicean legalistic lukewarmness. How can we pray for God to move if we won't move? How can we pray for God to change things if we won't allow Him to change us? But do you know the thing that I hate the most about legalism? It's this: people are going to hell! And while the Pharisee debates and argues over his genealogies and minor points of pettiness, the child in number 100 Templemore Avenue goes to hell.

Can I just finish by telling you how the Saviour dealt with this problem? John chapter 8, a woman caught in adultery, the Pharisees say the law says that we have to stone her. The law says, and if you don't obey the law you're denying the law - you're not a true righteous Rabbi or man of God. 'Let him among you', He said, 'who has no sin in him cast the first stone' - and everyone went out, from the oldest to the youngest. And He said to that woman: 'No man has condemned you, neither do I condemn you, go and sin no more'. When it was the law and the spirit, the spirit had the upper hand. He's walking through a field, a cornfield, with His disciples in Mark chapter 2, His disciples pluck an ear of corn, it is on the Sabbath day. The Pharisees say to Him: 'Look, he has broken the Sabbath'. He says to the Pharisees: 'Do you not know the Scriptures, that David went into the temple and ate the holy shewbread? Why? Because he was hungry, he needed to eat'.

When the need, hunger, is over the law the spirit is over the law, the spirit wins. In Luke chapter 6 the man with the withered hand, He heals him on the Sabbath day, and they say: 'You have broken the Sabbath again, you just disregard the law of Moses, you have come to abolish it and to destroy it'. What does the Lord say? 'Doing good, I am doing good - the Sabbath was made for man, not man to be squeezed into the Sabbath', do you see it?

What was Christ for? I'll tell you, listen now: He was for the sinner, He was for the adulterer, He was for the leper, He was for the disadvantaged, He was for the outcast and the untouchable - and the law said that you weren't to touch a leper, but He touched and He healed a leper. What was He against? The most vehement statements of a condemnatory nature uttered from the lips of the Lord Jesus Christ were to the religious prude, to the Pharisee, to the hypocrite, and to the one who used his religion to separate him from the sinner.

The first thing that this text tells me is that true Christianity ought to be primarily defined positively. Why? 'Why call ye Me Lord, and do not the things that I say?'. I wonder do some of us love the thing that Christ hates? What a tragedy that would be! If there is on the mean altar of our heart some little idol that may be right but is taking the place of Christ, can we repent of it? Should we? Of course we should! Will we? Well, that's up to you.

Father, we thank You for the directness of our Lord Jesus. We thank You for His simplicity, we thank You most of all for the truth that came from Him. We can truly say never man spoke like this man, it had the resonance of truth, and He spoke with authority - not as the Pharisees and Scribes spoke - and the common people heard Him gladly because of that, but the religious shunned Him. Father, may we be found with the common people today, and receive with meekness the engrafted truth, for Christ's sake, Amen.

The Sermon On The Mount - Chapter 23

"Sanctified Selfishness - The Power Of Positive Living"

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Matthew 7:12

Now we're turning again in our Bibles to Matthew's gospel and chapter 7, Matthew chapter 7. To get the context of our verse that we've been looking at for the last two weeks, we're beginning to read at verse 7. Remember again that these are the words of our Lord Jesus Christ. He says with regards to prayer, and the plan and purpose of prayer: "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him? Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets".

Last Sunday morning we looked at what I have called in verse 12 'sanctified selfishness', under the title of 'The Paralysis Of Legalism'. We looked at how various religions and cults in the world have this statement which is commonly called the golden rule, but they have it in the negative: 'Do not do to others as you would not want them to do to you'. We looked last week at how we, as evangelicals, can so often be known and seen to be negative people; known for what we do not believe; known for what we are against, rather than what we do believe and what we are positively for. For that reason we are looking at the second sense in this verse, and I've called it 'The Power Of Positive Living', or 'The Power Of Righteousness'.

You will remember, and David has reminded us through speaking to the children, that on one occasion our Lord was tested by the Pharisees. They asked Him: 'What is the greatest commandment in the law?'. Jesus said to them: 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment, and the second is like unto it: thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets'.

It's interesting when we look at Matthew 7 verse 12 that there is nothing mentioned of our relationship with God, but purely our relationship with other people. The reason why that is is simply, when the Lord stipulated to the Pharisees the greatest commandment, the first and greatest commandment - to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and mind - that was stipulated there: our love toward God and what our disposition and devotion toward God should be. But in the Sermon on the Mount, in the context in which we find verse 12, the Lord Jesus is speaking specifically of how we should behave and live toward other people. He is assuming that we obey the first commandment. Of course, the whole of the Sermon on the Mount so far has been telling us what we ought to do with regards to our responsibilities to God, how we ought to serve God. Specifically in this chapter it's been talking about prayer, coming before God - assuming that we have a relationship with God - and asking things from God.

Now He turns to our responsibilities toward other people. For that reason, one scholar in particular has called this verse the 'Everest of ethics'. 'With this commandment', he says, 'the Sermon on the Mount reaches its summit and its peak'. In chapter 7, and right from this verse specifically, the Lord is beginning to draw the

Sermon to a close. We are now entering into the conclusion of the greatest sermon that has ever been preached. But although it's beginning the conclusion of the Sermon, it is not divorced from the preceding verses that we've read together today. In verse 11 the Lord says: 'If you as evil sinners, depraved, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask Him?'. Then He says in verse 12: 'Do to others as you would have them to do unto you'.

What He seems to be saying in the context here is: 'Since your Father is a giver of good things to you, we also should imitate our Father in heaven and show kindness to other people around us'. In other words He's saying: we cannot expect good things from God if we don't know how to do good things toward other people. The reason for Him saying this, as you will realise, is that the Pharisees were in the circumference of His listening. But He was telling His own disciples in the presence of the Pharisees: 'This is the way to keep the law and the commandments. This is the way to keep the prophets and what they have foretold. If you want to fulfil the whole of the Old Testament law and prophets and writings, you need to do unto others as you would have them do unto you'. This is a personal and a practical righteousness, not what the Pharisees say and do, not their legalism, not all their little rules and petty restrictions and regulations; but the full fulfilment of everything that the law teaches, the prophets have foretold, and the writings are taken up with is to do unto others as you would have them do unto you. Not as the Pharisees did it.

We said last week that it is a kind of a reverse selfishness, a sanctified selfishness; that which you would selfishly want to indulge upon yourself, you should do it to others. We saw also last week that our selfishness often harms other people - that's the nature of it. We often harm our neighbour through theft and slander, lying, murder, adultery, fornication, cursing, quarrels, wars, and we could go on and on at sins that are deep rooted within our hearts and come out of our hearts, as the Lord said, because we are depraved and we are essentially selfish and proud. But now the Lord Jesus calls us to benevolence through our selfishness, to turn our selfishness on its head.

Didn't we say that the philosophy of this world is dog-eat-dog? 'Do it to others before they do it to you'. But the Lord is saying, even back in these days 2000 years ago, that the philosophy of the world is not the philosophy of the child of God. The way others treat us is not our gauge and not our way of measuring how we ought to treat them. But rather we are to treat them in the way that we think that they should have treated us.

So our Lord turns on its head the definition of what true godliness is. It is not what the Pharisees and the legalists and religionists say - a strict adherence to religious dogma and rules - rather it is a life of devotion toward God, to love Him with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. Also your responsibility toward your neighbour: to love him as yourself, and to do unto him as you would have him do unto you. In other words, a life that is a full fulfilment of the Holy Scriptures in the Old Testament is nothing more and nothing less than a life of love.

What did Paul say? "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity" - which is love in action - "I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal", which means an empty sound, 'I am all voice but no heart'. "And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not love in action, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing". We ought not, in the light of the word of God, in the light of the words of our Lord Jesus and Paul's commentary upon them I think - we ought not to count lightly the power of positive living. The power of doing unto others as you would have them do unto you. If it is true that the world sees us as fully believing this verse of scripture, and sees us and judges us in the light of this scripture that they seem to know rather than any other of the scriptures within the word of God, we must conclude with Paul: 'There remains faith and hope, but the greatest of all these things is love'.

We saw last week, and I want to remind you that true Christianity should be primarily defined positively - it should primarily be defined positively. We saw how there have been many negative forms of this golden rule. Hundreds of years before Christ, Confucius said in the negative: 'Do not to others what you would not like them to do to you'. Rabbi Hillel, a hundred years before Christ, said: 'What is hateful to you, do not to your fellow creatures. That is the whole law, all else is explanation'. The Greeks said it. The Romans said it. The cults, even today, and other religions say it - but their negative renditions of the golden rule are a world, a gulf apart from the positivity of what our Lord Jesus said. It's so different! Yet still today, we as evangelicals can be more known for what we don't believe and what we don't do than what we do believe and what we do do for others. However, when you come to the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, and ask Him: 'Lord, please define for me what practical Christianity is', He defines it positively.

Therefore we are to practice Christianity positively. When we think of it, we were not saved by a negative adherence to laws, were we? Were you? You weren't saved by rules and regulations and legalism. You weren't saved by ritualistic dogma. Therefore your Christian life ought not to be lived like a list of legal negatives. That is not what I'm saying, but that is what Paul the apostle says to the Galatians: "Are you so foolish having begun in the spirit, are you now made perfect by the flesh?". You began being born from above, begotten of God unto eternal life through grace. Grace alone has brought you to Christ, not works lest any man should boast. Therefore should we continue in works? Of course not!

Let me illustrate it for you like this. A family begins a holiday in a new car. Perhaps it's your family. You fill the car with petrol before you embark on your voyage and your journey up the road. You pack all the family in, and all the gear. The car is beautiful and it's running beautifully, the engine is purring and speeding along at about 55 to 60 miles per hour down the motorway. Further down the road, you are nearly out of Belfast and the tank has nearly run done. As you turn around as you're driving, you notice around you more and more people are pushing their cars up the motorway. They wave at you as they do it, as they go by. You wave back at them and just keep on driving, thinking nothing more of it. Finally you stop about 50 miles outside of Belfast, past the fast traffic and into the countryside. As you stop to relax for a little, someone who you saw pushing their car up the motorway stops and comes into the lay-by where you are. He asks you: 'How are you doing?'. 'Fine', you reply. The car-pusher asks: 'Where are you going?'. 'Well, we're taking a trip up north - the Antrim Coast'. Then he asks: 'Why are you driving? Because we're all pushing'. You say: 'Yes, I noticed that you pushed your car. Why are you doing it? I don't understand'. He replies: 'If you push your car the air stays clean, and it makes a lot of sense to push your car. We used to rely on petrol a lot, but no longer. Now we really understand what it's all about. We're pushers and not drivers'. So you let the car run out of petrol like he did. All the family get out and you begin to push the car - this beautiful, lovely, brand new car. You push it back to your holiday home.

Listen, Paul said exactly the same thing. In other words, are you foolish that having begun in the Spirit, you think you're now made perfect in the flesh? In essence he's saying: 'You telling me that you began with a full tank? You began with the Holy Spirit? And you're now pushing your way through life? Is that a powerful message? I think not!', he says. That means that Christ, the miracle-worker - the miracle working One now stands by and sits and watches you pull off a spiritual life that you never had before. 'Who are you trying to fool?', Paul says. Cars are made to drive, not to push!

We are not accepted by God because of our scriptural viewpoints. We are not accepted by God because of what we wear, or what we eat, or what we drink, or where we go. All of those things may be important, but 'Oh to grace how great a debtor!'. Our lives therefore are not to be defined negatively by man-made rules, but positively by the life of the Spirit in us, bearing witness through His fruit - through love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance. Against such there is no law!

So first, true Christianity should primarily be defined positively. But the second thing, the converse of what we learned last week is this: the emphasis in verse 12 of chapter 7 is upon your contribution - the emphasis is upon your contribution.

In the school that I went to, many times in assembly we were bored to death by the same type of moralistic and, at times I wonder, agnostic speeches. God was revered but there was no direction through God given. The principle, I feel, was just trying to get us to work harder and to do better academically, and to apply ourselves. But one little quip and quotation that he often made was made by John F. Kennedy when he said this: 'Ask not what your country can do for you but what you can do for your country'. In a spiritual sense that is what the Lord is saying. This is your contribution: the emphasis in this verse is upon what you do, not what is done to you. What you would like done to you, you do it to others. I read a poem in the week that has gone by, by Alfred Joyce Kilmer, and it went like this:

'Whenever I walk through Asia along the harbour blue,
I go by a great big church-house with its people strong and true.
I suppose I've passed it a hundred times, but today I stopped for a minute
And looked at the church, that tragic church, the church with no love in it'.

Another paraphrase of that poem was made later on, and it goes like this:

'Whenever I walk through the southland along the Fullerton track,
I go by a big congregation, with its cars parked in the front and in the back.
I suppose I've passed one hundred times, but today I stopped for a minute
And I looked in that church with its thousands of folk, that church needing my love within it'.

Do you see the world of difference? The world of difference between looking at things negatively and looking at things positively? The world of difference, as Christ defines how we should behave towards others, and He says that the emphasis is upon your contribution. Not what people are doing to you and saying to you. Not looking at the fellowship or looking at your friends and saying: 'There's no love in him', or 'no love in that'; but saying, 'There is someone', or 'some organisation', or 'some church that would benefit from my love in it'.

Do we do to them as we would have them do unto us? The Lord says: 'Do to them. Don't wait until they do it to you'. Is that what you believe? Is that the way you behave? When I see at times how many Christians, so-called, are in a spiritual huff because of something that someone has done to them I wonder do they really believe this verse? When I see right across our province how many people will no longer get involved in the work of God in case they get hurt again - they've been hurt in the past or they haven't been appreciated, so they don't get involved any more. Or people leave a church because they've been offended or something has happened to them, and they determine when they join another church that they will stand at the sidelines in case they get hurt, in case they get damaged, in case they get offended or let down. Of course, the work of God suffers, but worse than that: the word of God is made a farce. People say: 'I'm not appreciated for what I do'. The question is this: do you appreciate others for what they do for you? That's the question! If you would like people not to pass harsh judgement on you, then don't pass harsh judgement on other people. You say: 'I'd like people to pray for me'. Well then, you pray for them!

The big question here is: how do you determine what to do toward your neighbour? The way to determine what to do is what is good for you. What do you feel is good for you? Then do it to someone else. How many people in our land, and in our churches are so able to stand up for their own rights, but they are also able to ignore the rights of others? People who happily resent being slandered but think nothing of slandering the name of another? Those who fail to sympathise with those going through problems, but when troubles come

to them they wonder why people do not have compassion upon them. You could put it down to this: what you put in, you will get out!

What amazes me about the statement of our Lord here is that it far exceeds that. That isn't even what the Lord is saying here. The Lord doesn't say: 'Do what you would like others to do you, so that they will do it back to you'. That's not what He says, it's not some utilitarian 'honesty pays, and if you do the right thing, the right thing will be done to you'. But He says that the reason for doing good to others is because it is the will of God, and it fulfils all of the law and the prophets. The question is this to us today - and we've got to face it, you can't relegate this dispensationally into some old epoch (you can if you want, and maybe that's how you get around living the life that you do) - but we must as Christ's disciples face these words and see how we should have our lives defined positively in the eyes of others. We must see that the emphasis in our lives is not in what others have done to us, but our contribution to the society and environment in which we live in the church.

C.H. Spurgeon, the great preacher, once had a friend by the name of Dr Newman Hall. He was a great preacher and he was also a great author, and he wrote a little booklet called 'Come to Jesus'. Another preacher published an article against Mr Hall's publication in which he ridiculed it totally - he wrote it off. Mr Hall bore patiently with his argumentation for a while, but when the article gained popularity and was doing well Hall decided: 'Why should I take this when this is God's will to bless this little booklet?'. So he sat down and he wrote a letter of protest. He answered in full with retaliatory invectives that outdid anything that was in the previous man's article, he answered everything. We could say he wiped the floor with him. But before he mailed the letter, he took it to C.H. Spurgeon for his opinion. Spurgeon read it very carefully in detail, and then handing it back he asserted that it was excellent and certainly the writer deserved everything he got. 'But', he added, 'it just lacks one thing'. After a pause he continued: 'Underneath your signature you ought to write the words, Author of Come to Jesus'. The two godly men looked at each other for a few moments and then Hall tore the letter to shreds. How could the author who says: 'Come unto me all ye who are weak and heavy laden and I will give you rest' put his name under such a letter? We tend to think like that don't we? 'If they deserve it give it to them!'. We tend to think that bad behaviour is more justified on our part if we have been offended, if wrong has been done toward us, but that is not the teaching of our Lord. He says: 'Do to others as you would have liked them to do to you'. The person who is offended, the person who has had wrong done to them - the Lord is saying: 'You should be the very one. You should know better how to behave toward another - in the exact opposite of how people have behaved toward you'. The emphasis is on our contribution.

But thirdly and finally, what I want you to see that really comes out and hits us in the face out of this text is that practical Christianity is defined by our Lord Jesus Christ as 'doing'. Practical Christianity is defined as 'doing'. Our Lord goes past the passive restraint to an act of benevolence. The passive restraint of the Pharisees that says: 'Don't do this, don't do that, don't do the other and then you'll be holy'. He goes beyond that to an act of benevolence whereby we are defined by doing righteous things for others. He is telling us over and over again through this sermon that Christianity is not simply a matter of abstention from sin, but it is a positive goodness.

It's interesting that the Lord's half-brother James, in his book, and he echoes a great deal of the teaching within the Sermon on the Mount, he is the one who, in his great chapter 2 of that epistle, tells us that faith without works is dead. He tells us in verse 26: 'For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also'. You cannot say you believe in Christ, you're a child of God, and call yourself a Christian and sit right throughout your life doing nothing for Christ, and doing nothing for others!

If verse 12 - imagine this for a moment - if verse 12 was adhered to, do you not think it would just revolutionise everything? Do you not think it would turn this world upside-down, just as the disciples did at

the very outset of the church? It's not for salvation. We don't do good to others to be saved, of course the Bible doesn't teach that and you know that. It is neither even the sum total of all Christian truth. But what it is is the principle that ought to govern our attitudes toward other people; to do unto them as we would have them do unto ourselves. When we are faced with accusation, when we are faced with people who would do us harm, even when we are faced with others who would do us good, we are to appeal to our own judgement as to what we would like to happen to us if we were in that situation. Put yourself on a level with the other person! Tell yourself that they have as much rights as you have! Put yourself in their circumstances and ask yourself: 'How would I react and how ought I to react in this situation? How would I like to be treated in this situation?'.

If we were to test whether an action would be beneficial to another by asking ourselves those questions, we need to ask would we do many of the things that we do? Would we say many of the things that we say? Here is an answer. You might be confused as we have been going through this sermon: 'How do I behave in judgement toward this one and that one and the other? Do I have to get this plank out of my eye and then take the little splinter out of his eye? How do I weigh it all up? There's so much for me to think of here: how I behave toward other people. When is it right to come down on a person like a ton of bricks? When is it right not to say anything and just ignore it and love the person?'. Here is the declaration that sums it all up: do to others as you would have done to you! J.C. Ryle put it well, he said: 'In all doubtful questions between man and man we are to do unto others as we would have them do unto us. This settles a hundred difficult points. It prevents the necessity of laying down endless little rules for our conduct in specific cases. It sweeps the whole debatable ground with one mighty principle. It shows us the balance and measure by which everyone may see at once what is his duty'.

Are you in a situation at the moment and you are seeking guidance how to react? Here it is: do unto them as you would want them to do to you. How do we measure up? What size are we beside this Everest of ethics? How do we fare? How much are we shining beside the golden rule, the ultimate practical definition and summary of what Christianity truly is? Listen to what Matthew Henry says for a moment: 'By this rule the law of Christ is commended, but the lives of Christians are condemned by comparing them with it', he speaks in Latin, 'Aut hoc non evangelium, aut hi non evangelici'.

Listen to what he says in Latin: 'Either this is not the gospel, or these are not Christians'!

How do we measure up? It is utterly vain to speak like angels on our knees before God if we act like devils in our transactions with men. I think that today, in the age in which we live, one of the greatest obstacles to men coming to Christ is the hypocrisy of so-called Christians! Christians in their business, in their domestic lives. Hypocritical fathers, mothers with double standards, siblings with sinister competitiveness. Businessmen with appalling ethics and shady practices. Tyrant bosses, and employees who fleece their employers. In a world that knows perhaps this as the only scripture in any of their Bibles: 'Love others. Love your neighbour. Love your enemy. Do to others as you would have them do unto you'. Can we blame them if they think that we're a farce and our lives are a sham?

John R. Rice quoted this poem:

'You are writing a gospel,
A chapter each day,
By deeds that you do,
By words that you say.

Men read what you write,
Whether faithless or true;
Say, What is the gospel
According to you?'.

We, the apostle says, are to be written epistles, known and read of all men. The Lord is saying: 'If you wish to be a walking word of God, a walking epistle, a walking law and prophets, fulfilling every jot and tittle in the word of God, do to others as you would have them do unto you'. So can I ask you: is your faith defined positively? Can I ask you: do you contribute to the cause of Christ and others selflessly, no matter what others do to you and have done to you and will do for you? Can I ask you: is your Christian faith characterised by doing? If we were to ask James: 'James, what is the Christian life?'. 'Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world'. Doing unto others as you would have them do unto you! Ask John: 'What is this Christianity? How do you define it?'. Here is his definition: 'Whoso hath this world's goods and seeth his brother hath need and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?'. Doing unto others!

Our Lord, who came not to be served but to serve and to lay his life down a ransom for many - Lord, what do we say at the end of all this things? 'Child, why call me Lord, Lord and do not the things that I say?'. I promise you, if you do and fulfil this verse you will unleash a power greater than that of the atom: the power of positive living!

Let's bow our heads together. Can I ask you the question: whose agenda are you following? What attitudes do you have toward other people in this meeting? Neighbours? Friends? Do you operate with the standards of the world, the attitudes of the world? Or do you pervade a perfume of the sweetness of the law and the prophets which has its fulfilment in Christ and His law? Do you follow the One who carried a cross and lay down your life for others?

Father, we have been told, 'Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus' - the one who humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. We so are to clothe ourselves with humility and serve one another: 'For the greatest among you will be the one who serveth'. Father, help us, these are hard sayings and they run against the grain of our natural depravity. But we pray that through the Spirit, not through law but through the Spirit of God, that we will surrender ourselves and allow His presence to live in us that men may see our good works and glorify our Father who is in heaven, to whose glory we pray. Amen.

The Sermon On The Mount - Chapter 24

"With Christ At The Crossroads"

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by Pastor David Legge
Matthew 7:13-20

Now we're turning in our Bibles again to Matthew's gospel and chapter 7, Matthew chapter 7, beginning to read at verse 13 - and I've entitled the message today "With Christ At The Crossroads". We'll take time to read the remainder of this chapter in the last portion of the Sermon on the Mount, because it's very important in our exposition this morning that we put these two verses that we're looking at - verses 13 and 14 - in the context in which they are found, and the train of thought that the Lord Jesus is speaking with in this chapter.

So beginning at verse 13, the Lord Jesus says: "Enter ye in at the strait gate", or the narrow gate, "for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because narrow is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it. Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them. Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? And in thy name have cast out devils? And in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity. Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it. And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine: For he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes".

Any preacher will know that every good sermon will end, or should at least end, with a challenge - a challenge to obey the word of God that he has been preaching. Ultimately with that challenge there should come an invitation to enter in to the truth and the principle that has been expounded. Of course, the Lord Jesus is and always shall be the Prince and the King of preachers, and we have exactly this in these verses that we have read together this morning - specifically verses 13 and 14. You have the conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount, we are given a challenge at the end of the Sermon, and indeed an invitation to enter into all that He has been outlining in this great Sermon. You see that He does this by a contrast between what is true and what is false. Right throughout this Sermon He's been outlining and expounding for us that in life which may seem to be righteousness, may seem to be a righteous way of life, but the fine line that there can be between true righteousness and hypocritical righteousness, or self-righteousness. He's outlined for us right throughout the Sermon the true and the false, and now He comes into the conclusion, He's speaking again of the true and the false.

In verses 13 and 14 He talks about a true gate, the narrow gate; and then He talks about the false gate that is the wide gate. In verses 13 and 14 He talks about a wide way and a narrow way, in other words the true way

and the false way - but as we continue down this passage we see in verses 15 to 20 that He talks about true prophets and false prophets. In verses 21 to 23 He talks about true professors - those who genuinely possess the life of God in their hearts - and false professors, those who profess faith in Christ, and may do many mighty things, and say many mighty words, but the life of God does not dwell in their hearts. Then we read at the end of this portion, verses 24 to 27, that He talks about the wise man and the foolish man - those who take the truth of the word of God and build their lives upon it, and others who take falsehoods and build their lives upon them. So right throughout even this passage we have the true and the false.

So the Lord is coming, at the conclusion of His sermon, with an invitation for us to enter in not to what is false, but to enter into the truth of what He has been teaching in these words of this great Sermon. He gives us four warnings, each offering paired contrasts. He talks of two ways, two trees, two professions and claims, and then two builders each building their buildings on something different. So the whole crowd around the hearing of the words of the Lord Jesus is now invited to enter into the truth of what He is saying. We too, as we've been following the Lord in His teaching over these last few weeks, we are asked now to weigh up our devotion, our dedication and our profession to the Lord Jesus. He has been contrasting right throughout this Sermon that which is only an outward profession, an outward appearance of godliness and righteousness, and that which is a deep, real, living, vital faith in the Lord Jesus Christ that is seen and witnessed through an outward life of true righteousness that exceeds the righteousness of the Pharisees.

So right at the end of this Sermon, what is He asking us to do? 'You've heard all that I have said, now I want you to ask yourself: do you belong to this true righteousness, or do you belong to this false righteousness? In other words, do you have only an outward, Pharisaical, self-righteous appearance of religion that professes to be wise, that professes to have the truth, but denies the power thereof - or do you have a vital, genuine relationship with Christ as a true disciple and follower of His?'

Now the general picture is very clear within these verses that we're looking at this morning. There are two gates, two roads, two crowds, and two destinations. We're very familiar with choices in our lives, and in fact I would vouch to say that most of you are faced with choices every day. Your life is like a crossroads, and many crossroads that you face day after day. When you got up this morning you decided, probably, what you would wear - at least I think most of you decided, looking at you, what you were going to wear this morning! You decided what you were going to have for breakfast, maybe as you go to work in the morning you decide and choose what route you're going to take - what will be the fastest on any particular day, if the schools are off, or if it's a Bank Holiday or whatever. You go through work, and you may have to make decisions in your employment and in your vocation. Generally speaking we live in what we would call consumerist society - there are so many choices round about us, we live in a materialistic society, that anything that we can stretch our hands out to we can bring to ourselves, we can own, we can buy even if it may be on 'HP'. We have many choices that we can make, and we live in a generation today that perhaps we could say has a choice of many things that no other generation has ever had. We live in the 'supermarket mentality', where in every realm of life we can enter into the vast hall of goods, with a myriad of choice, and we can just choose our fancy. Decaffeinated coffee, caffeinated coffee, different types of ground coffee, different types of cereals, different types of breads and milks, and all sorts of foods and clothing and cars and you-name-it - we have been conditioned in the age in which we live to choose things out of a vast myriad and a vast selection of choice.

But here in the Sermon on the Mount, at the conclusion of these great words that the Lord has been speaking, He only gives His listeners one choice - only one choice! In the pluralistic society in which we live, a polytheistic society that has so many gods; and if you like in the religious realm we live in the supermarket of religious choice, that sees one choice as absolutely foolish - if you don't have every god under the sun to choose from - religion today is fusing together every god, every kind of faith and religion, so that there's no choice that all. It's not a choice between millions of gods, but we just all follow the one god, and everything

is the same. We don't have a choice from millions of deities, and millions of religious faiths, we have no choice at all because they just put them all together in a big snowball and say that we worship 'the one true god' - and no one really knows who he is.

But the Lord gives us one choice, one choice and only one - and as we go through the word of God, and even history, we find that all great men give other men great choices. The theme of two ways that we're looking at in these verses - verses 13 and 14, and indeed right throughout the passage - is the theme that's right throughout the whole of the word of God. It's a Jewish theme, it's common in Jewish literature, and you will remember - going to the very end of the Pentateuch, at the end of the book of Deuteronomy, chapter 30 verses 15 and 20 - as Moses is leaving the Biblical scene he says these words to the people of Israel: "See, I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil...therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live". He's given them the law of God, all the precepts and commandments that are laid down in the first five books of the Bible, and now as Moses is leaving them he says: 'Now I've set before you the way of life and the way of death; now choose, today, life, that you may live and that your seed may live'. And incidentally you will remember how the Lord Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, has been mirroring the law of Moses, and He's coming to fill up the law of Moses, not to destroy it, but to fulfil it in its perfect completeness - and now He, as the new lawgiver, is coming and doing exactly the same as Moses: 'Choose what I have said. I've set before you life and death, now enter into it and choose this narrow gate, choose this narrow way, and you shall live'.

Joshua, when he was laying down the leadership of the nation of Israel at the end of his life, he presented those people with the same choice. He said: 'Choose you this day whom you will serve'. Jeremiah, the great prophet, heard the voice of God saying to him: 'Unto this people shalt thou say, Thus saith the Lord, Behold I have set before you the way of life and the way of death', and Christ comes in the New Testament era and He gives us the greatest choice of all!

The big question is: what is the choice? You may say: 'What do you mean?'. Well what I mean by that simply is this: many people have debated theologians and scholars down through all the years what this choice is, what He is actually asking us to enter into. What is the gate that we have to go through, the narrow gate? Or what is even the wide gate that people enter through? What is the narrow way? What is the broad road? What is the destination of destruction and the destination of life? What exactly is it? Let me say to you today that the Sermon on the Mount is not a black-and-white sermon, and it is very difficult in some places, and indeed the word of God is difficult in some places - and we do the Scriptures a great disservice when we just push them into our little scheme and apparatus of doctrine, despite all the evidence that seems to be before our eyes.

I want to say at the outset of this exposition today: I don't hold all the answers, and I don't claim to have them all, but I'll say this: it is better to debate something and come up with no answers, than to come up with an answer without debating anything. We've got to be honest with the word of God, and many people say that this way, the narrow way and the broad way, are the ways that lead to hell and the ways that lead to heaven. There's no doubt about this, that this text can be applied to the Gospel, for in John chapter 10 and verse 9 the Lord Jesus said: 'I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved'. There's no doubt about it, the only way to enter into life is through the Lord Jesus Christ. I believe that in one sense the destinations here are heaven - life; and hell - destruction. But that is too simplistic in the context of where we're reading today, and I'll show you why.

If you go back to chapter 5 and verse 1, at the very outset of this Sermon, you will see that the Lord saw the multitudes and: 'he went up into a mountain: and when he was set down, his disciples came unto him: And he opened his mouth, and taught [his disciples]', saying these words. So the words, specifically in this Sermon, are to be applied to the disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ specifically. No doubt destruction and life

do mean heaven and hell in one sense, and I have no doubt whatsoever that this text can be applied to the Gospel, and I have done so myself. But what we have to remember is that right throughout this Sermon He has been speaking to these Jews as if they are part of the family of God - and now, as the family of God, He's given them the family prayer, He's taught them how to pray, how to fast, how to do alms, He now comes to them and asks them to enter in.

Some have said: 'Well, the choice is for a more developed Christianity'. In other words, Christ had not yet gone to the cross, He had not been buried, He had not been risen from the dead and ascended to heaven to His intercessory ministry, the Holy Spirit had not come in His Pentecostal capacity to form the church, the mystery of the church had not yet been revealed to Paul through the epistles and so on - and there's no doubt about that, that these disciples still had to enter into a greater understanding of what final Christianity would become. There's no doubt about the dispensational capacity and the historical context of the words that we're reading today. But nevertheless, that does not explain everything - why? Because the Lord is asking these people to enter in - not that they have entered in, and they still haven't reached their destination, but He is asking them to start and to enter in!

I hope you can see it, and I hope you can see that He's telling these people that there is a danger, these disciples that there is a danger that they can enter into the wide gate. Do you see that? He's not talking about being born on the wide road, as many people say, that's not what the text says - it says that you can enter in to the wide gate. You know that we are all born in sin and shapen in iniquity, you don't enter into it through sin. But whatever this is, people are entering into the narrow gate, but there's also the danger of them entering into the wide gate. I'll tell you what I believe the interpretation of this passage really is, and I believe that it is the only contextual interpretation, it's the only one that does justice to where we find it within this Sermon. It is this: the choice that the Lord Jesus is giving to His disciples here is the choice between a bogus and a true Christianity.

If you look at verses 13 and 14 you will see that they are found within the context of talking about entering into this way; verses 15 to 20 progressing along this way and not listening to false prophets, false peddlers of Judaism or Christianity; verse 23 onwards talks about living in the light of the ultimate day of judgement when all our works and all our doctrine will be analysed by the eye of God. I believe that it is a choice, ultimately, between a bogus, false Christianity, false spirituality, false righteousness, and that which is true. I believe that in the narrow way, the narrow gate, the narrow way and life; the broad gate, the broad way and destruction, you have a direct mirror image of the Lord Jesus Christ's claim when He said this: 'I am the way, the truth, and the life'.

Now there's no doubt about this, that this passage can be applied to the unbeliever as I have said, but if I could give you a mirror image of how this text ought to be interpreted, it would be to turn to Revelation 3 and verse 20 to the text that says to the church at Laodicea: 'Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me'. You and I both know that that verse is applied so many times to unbelievers, that Christ is knocking at their heart's door, and if they open the door they can believe and they can be saved - and that can be an application of that text. But the scriptural, contextual interpretation is not that! For that statement of the Lord Jesus is spoken, as you know, to a lukewarm church - a group of Christians that Christ was ready to vomit out of His mouth - and they are being invited to enter in, to enter into something, communion with the Lord Jesus Christ. I would see it as almost identical in application as what we read in the Sermon on the Mount.

Is your faith a Pharisaical faith, the faith of the false prophets that was only an outward appearance, or is it the depth of an inward reality? If I could put it like this in the words of the Lord Jesus Christ, Matthew 5 and verse 20 in our Sermon: 'Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the Pharisees' - it must exceed in its extent of righteousness and in its quality of righteousness. Yes, it can be applied to heaven and

hell, and no doubt the destruction and the life is heaven and hell, no doubt that these disciples had a lot more to enter into - but my friend, in the context of where we find this text, it is telling us that as disciples of Jesus Christ there is a choice that we have to make of entering into the full extent of the teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ that is laid down in this Sermon. In conclusion what He is saying to us is: 'Will you enter in? Will you make a decision to enter into all that is outlined in the Sermon on the Mount?'

With any choice that we make in life there are pros and cons, there are facts that we have to way up - and the Lord helps us to weigh this up, indeed in this text He is summing up the whole matter for us so that we may choose well. Now in summing up He gives us the two options: one, the wide gate is lethal to the many; and two, the narrow gate is life to the few. As He looks at these two options He gives us two things to think about in each of them. First of all there is a deception in each of them, neither of them is all that it's cracked up to be in the sense that it's not what it seems to be - there's a deceptiveness about these choices. Not only is there a deception, there is a reception in the sense that there are different types and different groups of people that are received by both of these gates.

Now let's look at the first gate, the wide gate that is lethal to the many. Let's look first of all at its deception, and its deception is simply this: although it looks inviting, it leads to destruction. The wide gate is lethal to the many. The Lord Jesus says, look at verse 13: 'Wide is the gate', in other words it is easily entered, 'broad is the road', it is easily trodden. You can enter this gate, and you have to enter it, but you can enter it very easily without any resistance, and you can tread along this road easily also.

One main feature of that which is false in our world, and indeed in religion, is to make gates that are narrow large, to make roads that are narrow broad. It is happening in the church today, where the word of God is being set aside and things are being broadened out, people are being accepted who clearly are not regenerated by the Spirit of God and do not hold to the doctrines of salvation that we have within the word of God - and what we see is an infiltration of what the Lord calls in verse 15 'false prophets'. False prophets are coming in, the gate is being widened, the road is being broadened, and they're telling us that there's plenty of room for everybody through this gate and along this road. It's broad, it's spacious, it's roomy, it's 'Spiritual Broadway', and across the ceiling is written: 'Welcome to each of you and to all your friends, the more the merrier, no matter what you believe. You can enter if you wish, you can travel along as you wish, as fast as you wish, and there are no restrictions to any of you'. There's plenty of room through the gate and along the road, plenty of diversity of opinions, laxity of morals, it is the road of tolerance, the road of permissiveness, it has no kerbs or boundaries of thought or of conduct - and travellers along this road can do as they please, they can go backward and forward, and right and left, according to their own inclinations and the desires of the human heart of fallenness that they own. They can leave nothing behind, they can bring all their baggage through the door - anything goes along the way!

Now, what exactly is the Lord saying to us? He is saying: 'Beware that you don't make your life choice of what road to go on according to the attractiveness, the comfort, the ease and the inviting of the gate and that road'. Do you see it? Is that not what He's been saying right throughout this Sermon? Don't judge by the outward appearance, the outward prayers, the outward fasting, the outward almsgiving, the outward rules and regulations of Pharisaical religion - don't judge this by the outward appearance, don't enter into this kind of faith, but enter into the narrow way, for the wide gate and the broad road leads to destruction. The word for 'destruction' here in the Greek language is simply 'ruin', or 'waste', and it can mean perdition and hell. But what the Lord is saying is that this broad gate that lets anybody enter and brings all sin and baggage in with them, and lets them go along the road of life as they please, it will ultimately end in the ruin and the waste and the perdition of humanity. If you live your life to satisfy the outward eye of other people, you will waste your life, you will ruin your life, and you will eventually damn your life!

There's no doubt about this that what is included in entering into this gate is going through the door of the Lord Jesus Christ and being saved, but the crux of the matter in this text is this: if you choose to go through

that gate, you have chosen that road and you have chosen your destination, and if you don't find yourself on the narrow road today it's likely that you never went through the narrow gate! That's His point! It's not primarily how to get saved, but it's how to live your life with the purpose that it exists for, and the reason that you are a Christian. It's talking about discipleship, the difference between true righteousness of the heart and a bogus legalistic style of religion - true discipleship! For anything else that is not following Christ, and taking up your cross and following Him with devotion and sacrifice, is the road to suicide.

The Lord tells us that that is the deception: although it is inviting, it leads to destruction. But He tells us about its reception, He tells us that many, or the majority, most people, enter in. Most people are duped, lured by it. It's very accommodating to travellers of all kinds, and all of their baggage that they bring with them - we could put it like this: it's the most populated gate and road, and it's the most popular. The most populated and the most popular - we could define it in our society today as the sensual gate, it feels good. It's the society-gate, it's the greater opinion and weight of all society; it's the feeling-gate, it feels good, and it's according to the opinions of the rest of humanity. It is the gate and the road that goes with the flow, all your natural inclinations are not challenged, all the small voices of conscience that protest are swiftly silenced. You've an abundance of liberty, you've an abundance of company going down with you to ruin - how inviting it is! But the Lord is saying: 'Don't be deceived by it!'

The wide gate is lethal to most. The second point He makes in these two verses is that the narrow gate is life to the few. It is deceptive in a sense too: its deception is that although it's uninviting, it leads to life. It's a narrow gate, the sense is that it's nearly that narrow that it doesn't even admit one person - you have to squeeze through it, there's a great resistance. The stronger sense is found in Luke's gospel 13:24, where the Lord said: 'Strive to enter in at the narrow gate' - it's a struggle. Really what the Lord is doing is He's going right back the start of this Sermon, where He tells us: 'Blessed are the poor in spirit'. If you want to enter into this spiritual life of a relationship with God, and a true meaningful righteousness, it's going to be a struggle.

I think it's very interesting that right throughout the gospel records the Lord Jesus never ever made it easy for someone to be saved - never! But He told them all the facts, all the pros, all the cons. He levelled with them and told them what they would have to suffer, that there would have to be a minimum of self and a maximum of God in their life. So much of the time we, in our Christian experience, are like Naaman. We're told by God to dip seven times down in the Jordan and we'll be made clean, and the servant said to Naaman: 'Why don't you do it, why do you balk at it? Why is it a problem? I know the Jordan is dirty, but if God had told you to do some great thing you would have welled up in your pride and you would have went and done it'. So much of the time we have pride, we have an inflated ego, a great sense of our own self importance, and that even prevents us pushing our way down that narrow road - but you're not allowed in, you're not allowed down with luggage or with baggage or with anything that will keep you back. The Lord said: 'It's easier for the camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man with baggage to enter into the kingdom of heaven'. It's like a turnstile, you can only get in one at a time, you can't bring your family with you, you can't bring a crowd with you, you can't bring your riches and your possessions and your church with you - and once you get through that gate there is a constricted way. It's tight, it's squeezing, in the sense of the word that is used of 'narrow' in verse 14, it's a different word than in verse 13 used for 'narrow' - it's the sense of persecution, it is a restricted way, the way of opposition; the way where you're not going with the world, but the world is going against you.

Who would choose that way? You might say: 'Few would choose it', and you're right, for few do choose it! The difference between a gate and a road that says 'do as you please', and the other that says 'do as He pleases'. Doing what you want, or doing what God wants; being restricted by the will of God and the word of God. My friend, which gate have you gone through? Which road are you presently on? And I say to you, no matter whether you profess faith in the Lord Jesus Christ today or not, if you find yourself on a broad road the indication is that you never went through the narrow gate! Of course, there are people who can be

backslidden, but I wonder - I never read of anybody who's backslidden right throughout their whole life's experience, I don't see that anywhere. I see people like Peter that had blips, and David that backslid temporarily and maybe for years went through times of darkness and dearth and degradation. But my friend, what I know that Jesus is saying here is that if you are on a broad road there is something wrong, and you need to beware of your destination!

Few ever find it. Do you know why few ever find it? Many people don't even know about it. That's the sense of what the Lord is saying. I used to wonder why - I'll share this with you from my heart - I used to think at times: you know, everybody's against me. All the world system, the philosophy, the popular culture, all of the intellectual establishment, even the church establishment - it all seems to be against biblical evangelicalism. But ought we to be surprised about that? Of course not! Half the world, most of the world the Lord Jesus says, don't even know that this thing is there, that that narrow gate is there and the narrow way is there! Even in Christendom you find that the higher up you go in it, and I mean in the service realm, the more you find that there are fewer and fewer men and women that really have the real thing. They have a parody of it, they have a practice of Christianity, but most of them have entered into the easy way.

I've so much more to say to you today, but I've run out of time. All I would do is ask you today: which gate have you entered into? Which way are you travelling on? And where will your final destination be?

Let us pray: Our Father, these words in this Sermon are very hard to implement within our lives. At times they have been hard for us to understand, but we know that we are brought to the crossroads with Christ today, and we know that these words can be applied to heaven and hell. Lord, we believe that what the Lord is asking us to do at the end of this Sermon, His great Sermon, is to choose: are we going to enter into this life, for this is the Christian life? It is not simply a matter of getting your sins forgiven and being on your way to heaven, but it is a life of discipleship, a life of commitment, a life of devotion, a life of sacrifice, a life of taking up our cross and following Christ. Father, if we have somehow found ourselves on the broad road, help us to analyse our hearts and to see if we are in the faith. If we've taken a detour and are in Bypath Meadows, that we would come again onto that narrow way. Father, we pray that in everything that we would seek, with all that we have in our being, to strive to enter into that gate, and to walk along the narrow way of the teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ - that we may have life, and life in abundance. We thank you that He is the way, the truth, and the life. Father, we pray that we will find in Him the way, the truth, and true life. Amen.

The Sermon On The Mount - Chapter 25

"False Prophets: Their Projection and Their Production"

Copyright 2002
by Pastor David Legge
Matthew 7:13-20

Now if you care to turn with me to Matthew's gospel chapter 7 for our reading again, and you remember last week - I may have confused you by announcing that it was the conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount, it is the Lord's conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount, but I don't intent to finish our studies for another couple of weeks. We entered last week into the Lord's official conclusion, if you like, of this Sermon that He preached in chapters 5, 6, and 7 of Matthew's gospel that we've been following in so much detail over 25 weeks or so. We're reading on from verses 13 and 14 from last week, we'll take time to read them too to get the flow of the Lord's thoughts - and again it is the word of our Lord Jesus Christ.

"Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it. Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them".

I want to speak to you today on 'False Prophets: Their Projection and Their Production'. False prophets, their projection and their production. If a prophet is a forth-teller of the word of God, and a foreteller of the word of God, which we know from the Old Testament specifically - he is one who foretold the future, being inspired by the Holy Spirit of God, God told him things that should happen specifically in the land of Israel toward God's people. He was a foreteller, but he also was a forth-teller: God gave him His word, and in a naked sense, a blunt A-B-C sense, he was one who told the word of God, and declared the word of God, and communicated what God had given to him. So if that's what a prophet is - a forth-teller and a foreteller - we can then see that the antithesis, the false prophet, the opposite of a prophet, must be a man who misrepresented God; a man who told either his own words or the words of the devil or a demon, but certainly not the words of God.

The verses that we have read together today of the Lord Jesus in this Sermon assume that we understand first of all the existence of false prophets, there are false prophets in the world and indeed in the church. One biblical writer says: 'There is no sense in putting on your garden gate the notice 'Beware of Dogs', if all you have at home is a couple of cats and a budgerigar'. There's no sense in the Lord saying: 'Beware of false prophets', if they don't exist, if there's no such a thing as a false prophet. The Bible tells us a great deal about false prophets, they're familiar both in the Old Testament and in the New. If you go to the Old Testament you find in the law in Deuteronomy chapter 13 verses 1 to 5 that there God laid down at the very beginning that if a man came into Israel and preached something that was not of God, he prophesied something that was to come to pass and it did not happen, he was to be stoned because he was and is a false prophet. It was very dangerous to be a prophet if you got something wrong, and it was dangerous to be a false prophet if you were found out.

So we have, right at the very beginning of the Old Testament, a definition of what a false prophet and false prophecy really is. We find, as we go through the Old Testament, that false prophecy was motivated not by loyalty to God - which was the motivation for true prophets - but rather motivated by a desire for popularity in themselves. In other words, it was motivated by pride. Recently we've been looking in the book of Ezekiel, and his contemporary who was in Jerusalem prophesying at the time. Ezekiel was in a concentration camp by the river Chebar, and at the same time Jeremiah was in the city of Jerusalem telling the folk that they were going to be deported and exiled, and the city was going to be destroyed. As Jeremiah was preaching that destruction was coming, and judgement was coming, and the Babylonians were God's instrument to come and to sack the city and take the people away to Babylon for 70 years, while he was prophesying true things, false prophets were rising all around in Jerusalem - one in particular called Hananiah - who were saying that what Jeremiah was saying was wrong, and that there would be 'Peace, peace', but God said: 'There is no peace'.

In fact, Isaiah faced the same thing. We read in Isaiah 30 and verse 10 that the people said to the prophets, to the seers: 'See not' - don't see these things, 'Prophecy not unto us right things, but speak unto us smooth things, prophesy deceits' - literally 'Tell us lies! We don't want to hear what you're saying, so tell us what we want to hear'. These false prophets, motivated by their own desire for popularity and their own self-conscious pride, they prophesied to the people what they wanted to hear. But not only were they motivated by their own popularity, but to a large extent they were motivated by nationality, they were motivated by an appeal to national pride. 'We're God's people, we're Israel, we've got the temple, we've got the law, we've got the covenants, we've got the land - don't come and tell us that God's going to judge His own people, we're His! The people of God's name!'.

Thirdly, not only was it motivated by popularity and by nationality, but it was served by their own selfish self-interest. They wanted money, many of them. Balaam is one example of that, and you can go right through the whole of the Old Testament: men and women, false prophets who were only motivated by their own desire for popularity, by nationality, and finally by their own greed. So in the Old Testament we see a simple definition of what a false prophet is and what motivates him. He's self-centred, he's wrongly motivated, he's detached from reality and what God is really saying to the people. Then we go into the New Testament, and the first occurrence that we have in reference to false prophets is in the Sermon on the Mount here in Matthew 7 and verse 15. The Lord says: 'Beware of these false prophets'. Then in Matthew 24 verses 11 and 24, the Lord Jesus tells us that in the last days, specifically during the tribulation period, there would be false Christs who would arise up and try to deceive even the very elect, Christians who are in the world at that time, and indeed the Jews.

As we go through the epistles later on at the end of the New Testament we find that the early Church must have been absolutely plagued with such false pseudo-prophets, for nearly in every apostolic letter that we have it contains a severe warning against pseudo-false prophets. In some of the letters they are called the Greek word 'pseudo-propheton' (sp?), pseudo-prophets literally, and that's the word that is used in Matthew 7 and verse 15. A prophet was one who was inspired by God, and these 'pseudo-propheton' were saying that they were inspired by God, but falsely so. It's similar to another word that you find in the New Testament 'pseudapostoloi' (sp?), pseudo-apostles, false apostles - in 2 Corinthians 11 verse 13 we find that title. Those who weren't just claiming inspiration, but they were claiming apostolic authority, that God had put His hand upon them to decide things within the church of Jesus Christ, and to teach the word of God and lay down doctrine. A similar term in the Greek is 'pseudo-dedascaloi' (sp?), pseudo-teachers. You've got pseudo-prophets, those saying they're inspired; pseudo-apostles, those saying that they're institutionalised of God to direct the church and to lay down doctrine; and 'pseudo-dedascaloi' are pseudo-teachers, those who are coming in and saying: 'Now, I have a message from God that God wants you to know'.

It's the word we find in 2 Peter 2 verse 1, where Peter says: 'But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers', pseudo-dedascaloi, 'among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction'. We don't have time to look at all of these titles, but you have false brothers spoken of, false speakers, false witnesses, and even in Matthew 24 we have pseudo-Christoi - false Christs! Those who the Lord said would pretend to be Messiah, those who John said in 1 John 2 verses 18 and 22 would deny that Christ had come in the flesh, and they would try to dupe and pervert even the Christians among them.

Now you will notice that all these Greek words have the word 'pseudo', or 'pseuda', at the front of them. We have that word in our English language: 'pseudo'. It literally means in the Greek 'a lie', something that is false, something that is sham - and that is exactly what the word means in our language today. Now let me give you another insight into these false prophets, turn with me to Acts chapter 20. Now we're going to take some time to go over this, because I think it's so relevant and so contemporary to the age in which we're living, so bear with me as we go through the word of God this morning. Paul charges to the elders of the church of Ephesus a great warning against false prophets. In verse 26 of chapter 20 he says: 'Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God. Take heed', beware, 'therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears'.

Paul is warning, day and night, the Christians with his own tears that false prophets would come into the church, would arise from within the church, and his clarion cry - like our Saviour's - is: 'Beware!'. The 'Didache', if you know anything about the history of the Christian church, was really the first order book that Christianity developed in AD100. It lays down really what Christians did in the very early Church. It tells us that Christians are to beware if any prophet or any preacher remains in their town or in their home over three days, and it says that if he remains there over three days he is a false prophet. It goes on to say that if any of them ask anything more than bread, he is a false prophet. If anybody asks for money, or orders a table before him, a meal to be set forth, and begins to demand things other than necessary bread and water, he is a false prophet. If he stays in your home and he has no trade, refuses to work but sits there all day, you get him some work! And if you can't get him any work, in other words he won't work, he is and I quote 'a trafficker in Christ, beware of such!'. A trafficker in Christ, in other words using Christ for his own ends.

The motivation is popularity, the motivation is selfish ambition, he's detached from reality. He's self-centred, self-interest is his driving force, and a desire for his own popularity, to tell people what they want to hear. It was like that in the Old Testament, and we find that Paul says, near the end of the New Testament in 2 Timothy 4:3 and 4, that it will be the same in the early Church and indeed in the last days - 'For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears', like an itchy ear, they want it scratched by the prophet who will tell them what they want to hear, 'And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables'.

Now why, in the conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount, does the Lord now address this very strange and odd subject, you might think. The reason why is simply in the context of the Sermon on the Mount, as He's been going through particularly chapter 7 talking about holy living, and the fine line that there is between hypocrisy and a real holy life, He's been talking about fasting, praying, almsgiving, and all sorts of things - He stuck a dagger into those who were motivated to be seen of men! Do you see the relevance now? After talking in the verses that we looked at last week, in verses 13 and 14 about two ways, He is saying there will be false prophets who will come to you and say: 'No, no, there's not just two ways, there's not a narrow way

and there's not a broad way, but there are many ways - or there's only one way you'll be saved in the end, it's a wide gate, it's a broad way, and it doesn't lead to destruction but it leads to true satisfaction'. You can see why He's introducing the subject of false prophets here in the conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount.

It seems in the context that the Lord considered the Pharisees and the Sadducees, who were listening to His Sermon, and who He indirectly pointed this Sermon to, and was warning His own disciples against their type of righteousness - it seems that they are the blind leaders of the blind, who are the false prophets even here in this passage. So you see the context, I hope you can. A false prophet will be like the Sadducees and the Pharisees, they will portray a hypocritical, ostentatious, self-righteousness, but they will have no inward life, no vital relationship with God, and no true righteous fruit emanating from their life. His external profession will not be supported by an internal production. His verbal and ritualistic projection of righteousness will not bring forth a vital and real production of holy fruit in his life. Essentially the kind of godly characteristics that we've seen in chapters 5 to 7 of the Sermon on the Mount will be absent from the false prophet.

So He's given us a warning not to be deceived, that there will be false prophets - in fact there are false prophets out there. The second thing the Lord does in this statement is that He tells us how we can recognise them: their existence, and secondly their identification - they are recognisable. This is what I want to leave with you, the first point is this: you will be deceived by false prophets if you judge them by their projection. You will be deceived by false prophets if you judge them by their projection. Secondly, you will recognise false prophets if you judge them by their production.

Let's look at the first point. Whenever the stern demands of verses 13 and 14 were given, the demands of true discipleship: take up your cross and follow Christ - the false prophets were inevitably going to arise and promote the wide gate, preach the wide gate, preach the wide way; and that's the connection between verses 13 and 14 and the rest of this passage. They will preach to go on the wide way, to go through the wide gate; and if you're going to avoid the wide gate and the wide way, you're going to have to be deaf to the false prophets. So the Lord says: 'Beware of the false prophets', literally in the Greek language, 'Hold your mind away from these false prophets'. Take your mind, and if they're near your mind, or they're starting to get into your mind, hold your mind away from them. They are there to put us on the broad road, and to keep us from the narrow way. They are there to water down truth until, as C.H. Spurgeon said, there is not enough truth left to make soup for a sick grasshopper!

You will be deceived, my friend, by false prophets if you judge them by their projection - what they project to be before you - simply because the Lord says their appearance, verse 15, is deceptive. You'll be deceived by what they project to you because their appearance is deceptive. The first reason He gives is in the first part of verse 15: they come in sheep's clothing. The first way they deceive you is externally they wear sheep's clothes. Now these aren't the pigs and the dogs that we found in chapter 7 and verse 6, because they're easily recognisable as pigs and dogs by their habits. These are people, the Lord's saying, that creep in unawares - Christians make the mistake of thinking that because they look like sheep they are sheep, and then eventually after a period of time their true character is declared - but it's too late, and the damage has been done to the other sheep. Jude talked about these people, he said: 'For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ'.

Now there are three possible meanings of the sheep's clothing that you can know these false prophets by. The first is the obvious one: they're portraying to be believers, they're portraying to be the sheep of God. They present themselves as insiders, they're disguised as sheep. But a deeper and a second meaning is that they are impersonating not specifically sheep, but impersonating shepherds. You might say: 'Well, that's not what the text says', but if you look a little deeper the word for 'sheep's clothing' may refer to a woollen garment that was worn by the shepherd in Palestine. In fact, when the shepherd watched his flocks upon the hillside, his

garment was one of sheepskin, and he used to wear it inside out so that the fur and the wool was inside and the leather was outside. The prophets too, when we go into the Old Testament, we find they wore a similar garment - in fact, Elijah wore what was called a mantle, which we find was a hairy cloak, 1 Kings 19. Zechariah, referring to false prophets, says a very interesting thing about them: they wear a rough garment to deceive. In other words, the false prophet wears a rough garment that ordinary prophets would wear to show that they are a prophet, and they deceive by wearing sheep's clothing, or literally shepherd's clothing.

It's interesting that in Luke chapter 20 verse 46, the Lord says of the Scribes and the Pharisees that they desire to walk around in long robes. There were those who were appearing not just as sheep, but as shepherds - prophets - as apostles, wanting to deceive the people of God, but underneath the cloak they were anything but sheep or shepherds. The third definition of what this sheep's clothing is, and what it really means, could be the simple way they come to the people - their gentle, plausible exterior. How persuading they are! They come after verses 13 and 14, and they say to the people: 'Look, this gate, it's not narrow it's wide. This way is not narrow, it's wide'. They're so kind, they're so polite, they appear such righteous men, they don't seem as violent as the disciples in their pursuit of the kingdom of God, and they teach this easy message to people, and people say: 'Ach, it must be true! It must be true!'.

In Ezekiel chapter 13 we have an incident of just that, we're not going to go into much detail, but if you remember our studies in Ezekiel we found that some of the false prophets, God condemned them because they were prophesying out of their own hearts, from their own spirit. God said: 'They speak lying divination', and in verse 22 of chapter 13 of Ezekiel God says: 'With lies ye have made the heart of the righteous sad, whom I have not made sad; and strengthened the hands of the wicked, that he should not return from his wicked way, by promising him life'. You've commended those who are doing wickedness for their wickedness, told them they'll have life; and you've condemned the righteous who are doing what I want them to do, who will have life, you're telling them that they'll have death. What is that other than the narrow way and the broad way?

The point that the Lord is making, talking about sheep's clothing, is that the false prophet does not advertise his falsehood. He comes as a preacher of truth, often with the language of the orthodox faith - and He's saying we, as disciples, must be discerning and never judge people by their projection. Never judge them by their qualifications, or their degrees, or their positions, or their titles - we should never believe what the preacher, or the pastor, or the minister says because of who they are, for the Lord says that if the blind lead the blind both will fall into the pit! But rather, the Lord says, we are to look underneath the fleece to see who these people really are. That is why John said: 'Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God; because many false prophets are gone out into the world'.

You will be deceived if you judge them by their projection, because externally they wear sheep's clothing. But secondly, the second half of verse 15, also internally they are ravenous wolves - inwardly they are wolves that want to tear the church apart. In first century Palestine the wolf was the natural enemy of the sheep. The sheep were naturally entirely defenceless, and the wolf, if he got among the sheep, would absolutely ravage them. Therefore Jesus taught elsewhere that the good shepherd always is on the lookout for the sheep, and always looks out for wolves; but a hireling, in other words a man who is hired to do the job of a shepherd but isn't really a shepherd and doesn't really love or own the sheep, he would run away and abandon the sheep if a wolf came along. Like the false shepherd, the hireling has self-interest. His self-interest causes him to love his life more than he loves the flock; whereas the good shepherd, Jesus said, gives his life for the sheep.

The false prophet teaches in order not to give but to get, not to impart spiritual wisdom but to display his wisdom. One scholar said: 'No man can at one and the same time prove that he is clever and Christ is wonderful' - you can't display your own wisdom, and then try to glorify Christ. His motivation is not to feed,

but it is greed - his god is his belly! He wants to satisfy his own fleshly lusts and desires - and these are men, the Lord is saying, who are ravenous wolves bent on devouring the flock of God to their own ends. We don't have time to read it, but that's why Paul in 2 Corinthians 11 - note it down - said: 'I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ' - and if anybody preaches another Jesus to you, it is not the Jesus that you have received! He goes on through the epistle and through this chapter: '[There are many] false apostles, workers of iniquity, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And you shouldn't marvel at it; because Satan himself transformed into an angel of light to beguile Eve'. Now don't you be beguiled by a false prophet who looks like a sheep, but underneath is a ravenous wolf!

These are vicious unbelievers who prey on the immature, the unstable, and the gullible in Christ. As Guy King said well: 'If you leave these wolves alone they will soon show their greed, and if you don't leave them alone they will soon show their teeth'.

Now the Lord tells us how to test for these false prophets. He changes the metaphor from sheep and wolves to trees and their fruit; from sheep's clothing which a wolf might wear, to fruit which a tree must bear. But the difference in the two illustrations is this: a wolf can disguise himself, but a tree cannot disguise its fruit - its fruit declares what it really is, what kind of tree it is. So that brings us to our second point: first of all, I told you you will be deceived by false prophets if you judge them by their projection; but secondly the Lord says you will recognise these false prophets if you judge them by their production - what they do. Simply because, as verses 16 to 19 tell us, their fruit is defining, their fruit is revealing. Verse 16 and verse 20 repeat this statement: 'By their fruits ye shall know them'. Now this isn't an encouragement to take up the sport of 'heretic-hunting' that many in Ulster do, and we have to remember the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount about judgement. But what the Lord is telling us to do is not to be censorious, but to be on your guard! There's false prophets out there, there's false doctrine out there, and the false prophet and the false doctrine can only bring forth bad fruit - it cannot restrain the flesh, it cannot bring forth holiness, all it manifests is wickedness. In 2 Peter 2 you can read down all the filthy works of the false prophets in their flesh.

We know from studying the word of God that there are many parallels between the natural world and the spiritual world. Newborn babes desire milk, so new Christians are to desire the word of God as a baby desires milk when it's born. We see this going through, the law of the harvest, and many other illustrations - and here we have another illustration from the natural world that corresponds to something in the spiritual. The Lord tells us, first of all, that the species of the tree can be known by its fruit. That's the first thing in verse 16: 'Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?'. That, if you like, is the natural produce of this tree, the natural produce, the species of the tree. In other words, from the law of Genesis, everything in this world brings forth after its own kind. It's a positive statement, it's telling us that the only thing that this tree can bring forth is what it's naturally designed to bring forth - like produces like. Thorn bushes don't produce grapes, thistles don't produce figs; and what the Lord is saying is with regard to the prophet, as Isaiah said: 'To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them'. Their natural produce, their fruit declares what they naturally are, the species of the tree.

Now, do you know what we have here? It is the Gospel A-B-C, and I think over the years we've lost it somewhere. Man is naturally depraved, he is utterly ruined before God - and what the false prophet does is he takes that up and he denies it, and he makes man his own saviour, and he makes Christ's blood redundant. Yet the fact is unchanged: that which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit - and He's saying this: 'If the fruit's bad it is telling and declaring and revealing that the species is depraved'. Incidentally, can we pause a moment, and can I remind you that true faith in Christ imparts a new spiritual nature to the child of God? The Bible calls it the new birth, and I'm not asking you have you made a

profession, I'm not asking you were you born into Sunday School or into the Iron Hall, or are your parents Christians and have they brought you up in a Christian way, I'm asking: what is your nature?

Secondly, verse 18 tells us that 'every good tree bringeth forth good fruit, but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit'. Now He's moved from natural produce to moral produce, He's stopped talking about the language of fruit and different types of fruit, and now He's talking about good and bad - moral definitions. So He's now talking about the grade of the fruit, the calibre and the character of the fruit. He's telling us: if the fruit in this prophet is not the fruit of the Spirit - Galatians tells us: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control - it will be the opposite, bad fruit: works of the flesh, immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envyings, drunkenness, cursing, and things like these. Those who practise such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. Morally their fruit will be bad if their nature is bad.

I think perhaps also the Lord is speaking of their teaching. As He said in Matthew 12: 'Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks'. The teaching of these apostles and false prophets will bring forth only immorality - therefore we are to test the spirits to see whether they be of God. Like the great Reformers throughout the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century, who were accused by the church of Rome of being false prophets and false teachers and false evangelists. They went to the word of God, the good fruit, the true teaching of God's word and they clung to it - and indeed the clarion cry of Luther's Reformation was: 'Cling to the word of God and then you will be able to recognise the judge who is right' - cling to the word of God!

J.C. Ryle said well, and summed this whole matter up well: 'Sound doctrine and holy living are the marks of true prophets' - sound doctrine and holy living. So, in examining the teacher we ought to look at both the character and the message of this man, and as you know fruit takes time to grow. It may not be immediately obvious the type of fruit that this man is bringing forth until his teaching eventually settles and grabs hold in people's lives, but eventually down the road some of these new successful systems and movements that rise up - after a while they're exposed by the moral fruit that they bring forth!

The species of the tree, its natural produce; the grade of the tree, its moral produce. In verse 18, what the nature cannot produce - if verse 16 was the positive of what it does produce, verse 18 is the negative, what it is impossible to produce. A tree can't bring forth anything other than its kind: 'Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?', verse 18, 'A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit' - but it brings forth wild grapes. As John the Baptist said in Matthew 3:10, it brings forth bad fruit and it's not good for anything but to be hewn down and cast into the furnace of the fire - in other words this fruit is useless to God! It cannot produce forth, it's impossible - and God says it's cast into hell. Peter says it goes to swift destruction, Paul says in Romans 9 it's fitted for destruction.

I want to pause again before we finish this message and say to you poignantly and with a heart full of love for Christ and for you: I can't say whether you'll be in hell or whether you'll be in heaven, but upon the authority of the word of God I'm asking you this question, what fruit are you producing? Old Spurgeon used to say: 'Never give a man the assurance of his salvation if he is living in habitual sin'. The proof of your salvation is not a profession 20 years ago, the proof of your salvation is the heart-life that you have at this moment - it doesn't say whether you're saved or lost, but it shows your condition at this present moment before God. Does your life testify and yield the fruit of God, or yield the spawn of the devil that one day will fuel hell?

So, as we close, in the last two or three minutes, we ask the question: who are these false prophets in our modern age, and how do you know them? Well, I hope that you can detect them from what we have learnt

this morning from our Lord Jesus' teaching, and from the character that they're meant to produce. It's not hard to locate them in our world today, is it? Is it hard to see that they are found in the ecumenical movement that dilutes the Gospel and makes it a gospel of works? It says there's no difference between Rome and Protestantism, and even between Buddhism and the Muslim religion, Islam, and everything under the sun - that it's all together, and there's no narrow gate and wide gate, but there's just one particular way. It fuses all the religions of gods together. The health and wealth gospel that says you should be rich, you should be prosperous, you should be successful in your business - a broad gate, a broad way where you can bring all the baggage that you like with you. Profiteering evangelists and prophets, those on the television, some charismatic healers - modern day Geoffrey Chaucer's 'Pardoner', who do their work for money, who turn the grace of God into lasciviousness. The cults who add to the word of God, the truth of God, their perverted prophets and satanic salvations. These false prophets can be found in the liberal theologians in the pulpits of the churches of our lands, in the university halls - who say that heaven and hell are a myth, and that a God of love could never punish anyone forever, Satan is a lie and a fairy-tale, all religions lead to God. They can be found in the higher critics who take the original scriptures, Greek and Hebrew, and pull them apart - they demote the word of God to a mere historical novel full of holes and fantastical contradictions. The unregenerate churchmen who are preaching in our land today, they are false prophets, ministers who populate hell with their salvation of good works in the sacraments and the church. It can be found in the philosophies of the age, relativism - that there's no more absolutes, everything's just as you like it and just as society dictates it. A modern psychology that makes sin a sickness rather than an immoral responsibility of every child under heaven - blame it on your parents, blame it on the establishment, blame it on society, and if it doesn't wash blame it on your genes!

Brethren, we must take our stand with historical, biblical Christianity! We must take our stand with the prophets and the apostles and the evangelists, with the reformers and with the great cloud of witnesses, and most of all with our Lord Jesus Christ, and cry like Luther: 'Cling to the word of God! Cling to holy life!'. Then you will be able to recognise the judge, the prophet, and the preacher who is right.

Our Father, in the age in which we live where many are known about with every wind of doctrine, double minded and confused - we pray, as the hymn writer has inspired us, to look only unto Jesus the Author and Finisher of our faith, who was the only Shepherd of the sheep, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross despising the shame, and is now set down at the right hand of the Father on high interceding for us. Lord, may we say at the end of the road, at the ribbon at the end of the race, that we have finished the race, finished the course, fought a good fight - but most of all that we have kept the faith, and that we will go to our reward having stood firmly upon the apostle's doctrine and the teaching of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.

The Sermon On The Mount - Chapter 26

"Profession Or Possession?"

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by Pastor David Legge
Matthew 7:21-23

Our title this morning for our message is "Profession Or Possession?" - profession or possession. The words that we read specifically in Matthew chapter 7 verses 21, 22 and 23 are the claims of those who are the false prophets that we were looking at last Lord's Day; and indeed, not only the false prophets but those who believe the false prophets and follow them. So these are the words, if you like, in the context of our passage - the words of those who profess and advocate and preach the wide gate and the broad road; those who try to encourage you to enter the gate that is wide with all the baggage of sin and other religious systems; those who encourage you to go down a broad road of unrighteousness: calling oneself a Christian, a prophet of Christ, a follower of Christ, yet living clearly in ways that are not according to the teaching and the holiness and the righteousness that is found in Christ. So these words today, specifically in the context, biblically, verses 21 to 23, are the words of the false prophet and the words of the false professor - those who preach this message of the wide gate and the wide way, and those who enter into the wide gate and follow and travel down the broad road.

In the context of the Sermon on the Mount, it seems that the people of the broad way say what they say and do what they do in the name of Christ - that's very important. One common, perhaps pre-eminent, theme throughout verses 21 to 23 is the amount of times that we find either specifically the name of Christ - 'Lord, Lord' - or these people say that they do certain things in the name of Christ: 'We prophesy in Thy name, we cast out demons in Thy name, we do many mighty miracles in Thy name'. These people say continually throughout this passage: 'Lord, Lord'. So what they are doing, as false prophets, and as false professors who follow the teaching of the wide way and the wide gate, are all done and said in the name of Christ.

You don't have to be a deep scholar of church history to realise, and indeed world history, that many things in history have been done in the name of Christ, but would never have earned the approval and the authority of the blessing of the Lord Jesus Christ. A quick survey: we can look many hundred years ago to the Crusades, where many innocent people were slaughtered because they were of a different faith and a different religion, in the name of the cross and in the name of Christ - wrongly! We even look to the Reformation and we see many Protestant martyrs who were burnt at the stake; some who were beheaded; some who were hung, drawn and quartered in the name of Christ. Incidentally, others who were hung, drawn and quartered, sacrificed and burnt at the stake by even the Protestant reformers. Many who did not believe in child baptism were burned at the stake; people who we would call Baptists today, who were then called Anabaptists, were burnt at the stake and murdered by both sides: Protestant and Roman Catholic. All of these things were done in the name of Christ.

There have been various holy wars throughout this world's history, and we know of holy wars today. Even today, in our materialistic age, there are shepherds who wear the sheep's clothing - who we looked at last week - who preach a 'health and wealth gospel'; who say that no-one should be poor if they're a Christian, no-one should be sick, you should have 100% health and 100% wealth. There are even evangelical healers who say everyone should be healed and we can see, as we look at them - and even the world, who seem to be wiser than the children of light, can see - that these are nothing but evangelical tricksters; and if they fail as evangelists they could make a lucrative career as professional magicians and illusionists.

As well as that, there are people in the United States - we hear it in our news bulletins, read of it in the periodicals - who shoot abortion doctors. We believe and characteristically state as Christians today in

Northern Ireland that we condemn abortion as murder. It is abhorrent and an abomination in the eyes of God - but we also should condemn those that shoot doctors who carry out abortions. Yet these things are done in the name of Christ! As we come home today we can see even in our land of Ulster that there are things that are said and done in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, which are nothing short of a blot on His testimony and on the cause of His gospel.

I believe, in the context of the word of God, that doing such things in the name of God and Christ is nothing but a transgression of the third commandment. If you turn back to your Old Testament, to Exodus chapter 20 and verse 7, we find the words of the law says this: 'Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain'. Most people hold that commandment as a prohibition of swearing. It says, people believe, that you ought not to take the divine names as an oath or as a curse or as a swear word; and it does of course mean that: that you should not use the divine name loosely or blasphemously or meaninglessly, or use it emptily. God's name is sacred, God's name is to be held in reverence. But more than that meaning, probably primarily, the third commandment means that we ought not ever to do something in God's name, or claim something in God's name that has absolutely nothing to do with God and would never find God's approval.

These false prophets and false Christians that we have been studying in recent days claim to be and to do certain things in Christ's name which, according to the words of Christ, He Himself refutes and vigorously denies. In fact, in the final analysis we find in verse 23 that He rejects their works and, in fact, He rejects them: 'I will profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity'.

If you look at verse 21 you will see that their claim of Christ is in the present. 'Not everyone that says unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven'. It doesn't say: 'Not everyone who will say on that day', but it's talking about people in the present who claim Christ as Lord - here and now! So these are not people who have lived another religion. These are not people who, quickly at the end of their life, who lived as atheists, try to fool God and say that they're Christians, as they come to the judgement bar of God. But these are people who, in life, have called Christ: 'Lord, Lord', and broadly speaking have lived so-called nominal Christian lives.

As we read verse 22 we find that their argument for why they are truly disciples is set in the future. Their claim of Christ is in the present, but the reason why they claim Christ and their evidence - they say - for it is set in the future. Look at verse 22: 'Many will say to me in that day' - future. We've got to ask the question before we go on: what is that day? You remember that, as the Lord began His conclusion, we believe in verse 13 - talking about the narrow gate and the narrow way - He began talking about two ways that illustrate the start of the life of faith, or the start of a life that will lead to destruction. Then He went on, in verses 15 and following, to talk about two trees. He's not now talking about the start of a life of faith, but talking growth and the results, and the fruit that we ought to have, or do not have if we're in or outside of the faith - the here and now of what it is to be a Christian and show forth fruit in our lives.

Now He's coming, in verses 21 to 23, to talk about two professions. Later on, as we've read this morning, He will talk about two builders. But both the two professions and the two builders are talking about the end of the life of faith. The narrow gate, the narrow way, talks about the start of this life of faith. The two trees and the two types of fruit talk about the progress here and now, and the results and the growth in this life of faith. But now He's coming to talk about two professions and two builders that are specifically looking forward to the end of the life of faith, when God shall call everything into judgement before the child, or the so-called child, of God. What the Lord is saying is: profession will ultimately be tested by God.

What we are taught, simply, here is that the claims of men and women on that day mean absolutely nothing. In fact, even what you claim today, what you say your relationship with Christ is at this moment doesn't

really mean a thing, and it will never ever do anything for your eternity. These verses are teaching that what really matters is not what you say now, not what you say on the day of judgement that matters, but your final salvation will rest upon not what you say to Christ, but what Christ will say to you. In other words, what you profess to have done or been for Christ won't matter, but only what He professes about you here and now, and on that day, will really matter and destine your eternal home. Surely that's what verses 21 to 23 are telling. Indeed, as we'll see probably next week, if we get through this this week, verses 24 to 27 say exactly that: that the wise man built his house - what on? He didn't build his house on his own claims, he didn't build his house on his own life or what he did for Christ - but the Lord Jesus says in verse 24: 'Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock'. The wise man builds his house upon the claims of Christ, the professions of Christ, not his own professions.

We have had two ways, two trees, and now two claims or two professions. The rest of the pairs that we have studied so far contrast between the true disciple and the false disciple. The true disciple enters through the narrow gate and goes along the narrow way. The false disciple enters through the wide gate and goes along the wide way. The true disciple bears forth fruit of its kind: good fruit, moral fruit, godly fruit. The true tree brings forth fruit of the Spirit, but the false tree brings forth useless fruit, and is good for nothing but to be cut down and fed to the fire - that's the only use for it! But now we come to a contrast, not between the false professor and the true professor, not between the true disciple and the false disciple, but rather what the false disciple professes about himself - and the contrast is what Christ professes concerning the false disciple.

Let's look at it today, and let's look first of all at verse 21 and 22. Here we have two things - verses 21 and 22 - what many will say to Christ on that day; and in verse 23, what Christ will say to the many on that day. But let's look first at what many will say to Christ. First of all, they claim to be a disciple of Christ - verse 21 - they say: 'Lord, Lord'. One paraphrase says this: 'Not all who sound religious are really godly people' - that's really what it means. The Lord says not everybody who sounds religious and says: 'Lord, Lord', is a godly person and shall enter into the kingdom of heaven - 'They may refer to me as Lord but they still won't get into heaven'. So, first of all, what the Lord is saying is that the claim to be a disciple of Christ does not inherit you heaven. Profession of ownership, naming the name of Christ does not constitute an entrance into the kingdom of heaven.

You know, if you're a New Testament student, that profession of Christ as Lord is indispensable to be saved. Romans 10 teaches us that: 'That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation'. The Lord Himself said in Matthew 10:32: 'Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven'. So confession - profession of Jesus as Lord - is not unimportant. It is the first step, if you like, of salvation. But even Paul the apostle, in his epistle, says that profession of Jesus as Lord is impossible to make truly and genuinely without the Holy Spirit. Remember what he said in 1 Corinthians 12 verse 3: 'No man can say that Jesus is Lord, but by the Holy Ghost'. You might say: 'Well, that's a contradiction because these people are calling Jesus 'Lord''. Obviously the missing dimension, the missing element right away in these professions of these men in Matthew chapter 7 is the factor of the regenerating work and act of the Holy Spirit that truly makes a man or a woman, a boy or girl, a child of God. Their profession is false, they are saying: 'Lord, Lord', they are claiming to be a disciple of Christ, but the Holy Spirit of God has never done a work in their heart.

You can see what is present that shows us that this is, they seem, a genuine profession. They say: 'Lord, Lord', twice. 'Lord' is the New Testament way of reverencing the name of God - calling Him 'Master', yes, but it can also be the New Testament way of calling God's name 'Adonai', or 'Jehovah' if you like. So these people that are claiming to be disciples of Christ have orthodoxy. They know the scriptures, they know

divine truth, their doctrine is correct. But they've also got courtesy, because courtesy says 'Sir' - Lord could often be a title, simply like 'Sir', of respect and reverence. But you notice they repeat this phrase twice: 'Lord, Lord'. So not only have they got orthodoxy and courtesy, but they've got fervency. They are determining everybody to know, and Christ to know, that they consider themselves to be one of His disciples: 'Lord, Lord'. They are intense about this, they are intense about their claim on Christ.

As you go through the Bible we find that many times names are repeated, and it's repeated in a time of intensity: 'Master, Master'; 'Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?'; 'Abraham, Abraham'; 'Moses, Moses'; 'Samuel, Samuel'; 'Simon, Simon'; 'Martha, Martha'; and the greatest of all, 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?'. Each of those double-barrel statements can be traced to a time of deep intensity. What we have here in these claims of these false disciples - they are insisting intensely that Jesus is their Lord: 'Lord, Lord'. In fact, there's a sense of urgency, they're looking for a positive reply, they're looking for Him to reciprocate and tell them: 'Yes, you are My disciple'.

Jack Van Impe was a traveller who preached the gospel wherever he went. One day he was residing in a little humble abode with a man who had once been on skid row and had found Christ, and was now a real blazer for God. He brought the preacher into a very basic room, and he told him that he could spend as much time as he liked there, and that he was to get alone with the Lord in that little room, and get the messages for the week's meetings that lay ahead. So Jack Van Impe began to pray and seek God's face, and to meditate. Suddenly, as he was praying, prostrating himself for God, and asking God to reveal to him what he should preach on, he heard a little voice in the corner of the room say: 'You must be born again'. Of course, he sat up - he thought perhaps there was a divine messenger come to greet him! But when he turned round, he looked into the corner of the room and there was a little parrot. The parrot was continually saying: 'You must be born again. You must be born again'. He realised that this man who was a real trophy of grace, and converted by God's mercy, was so thrilled with the gospel that he would go around the house chanting verses, one of which was: 'You must be born again'. The parrot heard him so much that he'd started reciting this. But believe it or not, Jack Van Impe decided: 'I know what I'm going to preach on tonight. I'm going to preach on parakeet Christianity'. Those who have all the language and say all the right things, but haven't got the life. Those who have a form of godliness but deny the power thereof.

In fact, as we look further into this passage we find that those who claim to be the disciple of Christ falsely, and say 'Lord, Lord', profess ownership of Christ specifically because of what they practice in His name. Look at verse 22, not only do they claim to be a disciple of Christ, but they claim to be used of Christ: 'Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? And in thy name have cast out devils? And in thy name done many wonderful works?'. A paraphrase says: 'Lord, Lord, we told others about You, and used Your name to cast out demons, and to do many other great miracles. We used Your name to do these powerful things that profess outwardly, miraculously, that we are Your true disciples'.

If you cast your mind back to last week's study you'll remember that verses 15 to 20 tell us that a good tree cannot bear forth bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear forth good fruit. Christ has said that the fruit of the false prophet was not good, and was certainly no good for God - yet these false prophets, and false professors who follow the false prophets, are claiming to have done marvellous signs and wonders in the name of Christ. In fact, it seems that their whole confidence of why they can call Jesus 'Lord, Lord', is in these great miraculous works that they have done. Now we know that they couldn't have been genuine, we know that they couldn't have been good works of God - verse 18 testifies to that: bad fruit could only be brought forth from a false prophet. I don't know what these works were, they may have been slight of hand, illusions, a bit of magic, they might have been demonic phenomenon - because, as we go into the book of Revelation, we find that the false prophet one day will be able to do counterfeit signs and miracles and wonders in the power of the devil himself. We even read in Acts chapter 19 about Jewish exorcists, the sons of Sceva, who added the name of Jesus to their repertoire and banished demons out in the name of Christ - even though they

weren't believers themselves. I don't know what these were, they may have been genuine supernatural works, but all that they prove is this - all that signs and wonders in general prove is that a supernatural power is at work. What kind of power is a different matter - but what they certainly proved in the lives of these false prophets and false professors, is that all they had was external traits of apparent spiritual life.

These were things that others could see, they weren't righteousnesses of the heart, they were righteousnesses by them speaking name of Christ - they were able to cast out demons, they were able to prophesy, they were able to do great miracles, and others would look upon them and say: 'What great prophets these are! What great Christians these are! They must definitely be Christians, look at the supernatural power that is in their lives!'. What the Lord, I believe, is saying is: there were many external things that were certainly in vogue in the life of these men, but He says that the very internal thing that should be in the heart of a man or a woman of Christ was missing! They verbalised their profession in verse 21: 'Lord, Lord', they continued it by verbally professing the name of Christ in great miracles - but in the depths of their soul there wasn't a possession of the Spirit of God. Over and over and over again they emphasise the name of Christ, the openly confess Him with their lips and with these great supernatural acts, but Christ was not in their life!

First they proclaim His word: 'Lord, did we not prophesy in Thy name?'. Do you know what that tells us? The practice of prophecy, even in Christ's name, does not constitute entrance into the kingdom. Not only do they prophesy in His name, it says they brought deliverance in the name of Christ - they cast out demons in His name, verse 22. The practice of exorcism, Jesus is saying, does not constitute entrance into the kingdom of heaven. Thirdly He says they say: 'Lord, we've displayed Your power by using Your name, we've performed many wonderful works, many miracles!'. The Lord is telling us that even the profession of the name of Christ in miracles does not constitute entrance into the kingdom of heaven. Now notice, the Lord doesn't deny those claims. The Lord doesn't deny that they prophesied, the Lord doesn't deny that they cast out demons, the Lord doesn't deny that they did miracles in His name. But the fact of what the Lord says is: although they did all these things in His name, they didn't know Him, and He didn't know them!

Many in our generation, and within the church of Jesus Christ today, have put their faith in some kind of spiritual experience. Many, especially in many charismatic circles, can be seen to put so much emphasis on spiritual experience, but divine obedience to the word of God is absent from their life. D.A. Carson, in his commentary on the Sermon on the Mount, tells of a man who enjoyed what he took as a special outpouring of God's Spirit and blessing upon his life. He felt, like Paul, that he had been transported to the third heaven and blessed in things and ways that he couldn't even express. So momentous was this event in his life that he detailed it all down in a manuscript on paper, and he gave it the title: 'My Experience'. Months slipped away, and eventually he became indifferent to spiritual things. At first he persevered with a form of godliness, and time after time when visitors would come to his home he went upstairs and hauled out of the drawer this manuscript, and showed them all about his experience. But as the months passed, and eventually the years, even the form of godliness was abandoned and his experience - great as it was at the time - lay forgotten in a top drawer in his bedroom. It got dusty, it got haggard. Many years later a minister came calling to his door, and the man - thinking to impress his visitor - called upstairs to his wife, asking her: 'Love, bring down my experience!'. She rummaged around until she found the tattered document and replied: 'I'm sorry dear, but your experience is rather moth-eaten'. Because he was resting on something in the past, spiritually, that happened, but obedience was missing from his life.

What is the Lord saying? What is He saying here? He's saying what He's said right throughout the whole Sermon on the Mount: there is a difference between practising Christian things and true obedience to the will of God the Father. He says that those who will inherit the kingdom of heaven, verse 21, are those who do 'the will of my Father which is in heaven'. Now notice He doesn't say 'the will of your Father', He's not taking anything for granted. He's talking here about rather than doing what people expect me to do as a Christian, what they think a Christian ought to be, but being and doing what God says a Christian really is! Remember

the disciples came on one occasion and were rejoicing that the devils were subject to them in the name of Christ, and the Lord said: 'Look, rejoice not that these are subject unto you, rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven'.

Now here's what the Lord is really getting at - remember that this is all in the context of the Sermon on the Mount - a true Christian, specifically, will be a man or a woman not just who confesses Christ with their mouth, not just who does great spiritual, supernatural even exploits in His name, but a Christian will be a man or a woman who obeys the word of God and the will of God. What is the word of God and the will of God in this Sermon? It is every single thing that He has detailed - the principles, the precepts, the teaching of the word of God contained in the Sermon on the Mount. Do you see what He's saying? Don't take this out of context: the defining mark of the Christian will be that his life has some kind of semblance to the teachings found in the Sermon on the Mount.

The difficulty for many is: where does that leave the scholar or the Bible student that says that this portion of Scripture is not for today? I would put to you that if you believe that, you've listened to false prophecy, and you need to beware because you may be on a broad road. The Lord says that this is the very mark - given to the Jews, of course; He was talking about false prophets, of course, who were the Scribes and the Pharisees - but as we go into the epistles we find that there are Gentile comparisons to false prophets and false professors. We believe in our generation today that we still have the false prophet and the false professor, and the mark - their fruit will be that they live a life according to the teaching and precepts of Christ. You and I both know how easy it is to use religious vocabulary, don't we? It's dead easy, isn't it? To say: 'Lord, Lord', and not obey what He says - and in fact, in the context of Luke 6 where He's talking about exactly the same thing as He is in this passage, He says: 'Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord', and do not the things which I say?'.

You can talk a Christian, you can memorise scripture, you can sing Christian songs, you can trot out all the cliches, but what is not easy - all those things are easy - but what is not easy is the very thing that is the test of faith: obedience to the word of God! Do you see it? Oh, you don't have to look too far to see it, and many of us in our day and age have witnessed and heard of some great supernatural act that was done by someone - and as far as you can tell, as you look at his life and try to judge righteous judgement, their life doesn't weigh up by the great works that they're performing. All the things that they say and do, it doesn't seem to measure up with the morality or the immorality, or even the amorality of them! Charismatic leaders, TV evangelists, all the same - and they have a great following of people. What do people do? They reason in their own minds, and they say: 'Well, if he can do that - I mean, you can't deny what he has just done, he's just healed a man! He's raised a man from the dead! Something supernatural has happened, he must be from God!'. What is the Sermon on the Mount teaching us here today? This is what it is, listen: if a man or a woman's life does not measure up to the word of God, it doesn't matter what they can do - even in the name of Christ - they have a rotten root, and their fruit is rotten also! Whether it be rhetoric, ritual, it is not a substitute for righteousness.

Now I'm sure that, as the Lord Jesus went around Palestine for three years with His disciples, that Judas had some kind of input in the wonderful works and wonders of the disciples. But that was no proof of spiritual life in him, was it? Satan, the epistles tell us, one day, in a day yet to be, with lying wonders will delude and deceive people. But Jesus says the mark of a true believer, who is not just a professor but a possessor, is a man or a woman, a boy or a girl, who hears the words of God, who hears the words of Christ, and does them! That's what the whole epistle of James is about, isn't it? If you go to James chapter 1, you find in verse 22 - and remember that James was the Lord's half-brother, and you find mirrored in the epistle of James much of the Sermon on the Mount - he says: 'Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves'.

The Lord is saying - grasp this, now - if you can hear the words of God, and not do the words of God, and do not live in the reality of these words of Christ, not only are you unregenerate but you are rejected of God! Don't dilute the words of Christ, now. The second chapter of James verse 17: 'Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone'. Imagine if you could prophesy in the name of Christ, if you could tell the future for Christ, if you could heal a man on a stage for Christ, if you could cast demons out of people in the name of Christ, if you could do a miracle for the name of Christ - you could do all those things, and still be on your way to hell!

Perhaps none of you have claimed to do these things, you say: 'Well, I've never cast out demons, I have never prophesied, I've done no mighty works for the name of Christ' - where does this leave you? Where does this text come into your life and apply to you? Here's the issue for you, my friend: does your life measure up to your claims of Christ? Is your profession just rhetoric or ritual? Are you doing what people expect of you as a Christian, or is your life filled with the type of righteousness that Christ wants in His disciples, that He says exceeds the righteousness of the Scribes and the Pharisees? The Lord says that if this is absent from your life - Jesus teaches now, not me - that the likelihood is, if your life doesn't measure up to your lips, you're on the broad road! And one day it will be declared - for what you say about Christ matters not, but what He will say to you.

In verse 23 the Lord says that even though there are many who profess faith in Him, He will cast many of them into hell. He will say to them: 'I am not your Lord, I never knew you!'. 'I will say to them' - openly, publicly, literally it means 'just as you have publicly named me and professed me in these great works' - 'you have never been mine! You're self-deceived!'. I believe that the tragedy of that moment will be that there will be actually those people, many who named the name of Christ, who claimed discipleship, who claimed to be used of Christ, and they will not truly know the real reason why they've been cast into hell! Of course, it will dawn on them, but at that moment they actually are so self-deluded that they try to argue: 'Lord, but we did this, we are Yours, we own You!'. He will say: 'I never knew you!' - do you know what that means? Even an assurance of salvation is not enough! For these men and women are assured that they're saved, they're assured that they're alright - but it was a false assurance! It was a self-deceived assurance! Their profession was verbal but it was not moral; their profession was on their lips but it was not in their lives. They called Him 'Lord', but they'd never submitted to Him as Lord or obeyed the Father's will.

The Lord is saying that they might claim to do mighty works, but where are their everyday works? What counts, He says, is that you have a living, vital relationship with Christ that overflows in obedient righteousness, in holy good works in your life. 'I am not your Lord', He will say. Secondly He will say: 'You only practice sin. All those things that you say you do in my name - you practice lawlessness'. You think: 'Well, these things are commendable, these are holy things' - my friend, if you go to Philippians 3 you will see that Paul listed all the righteous things that he did in his life in Judaism, there was no-one to touch him. Yet he tells us in the book of Timothy: 'I am the chief of sinners', why? Because the greatest sinner of all is a man who thinks he's alright, the self-deceived false professor! That is why Paul says: 'Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, let every one that nameth the name of Christ' - what? - 'depart from iniquity'!

'I am not your Lord, you only practice sin' - and thirdly, 'You have arrived at your chosen destination'. I'm not going to beat around the bush, but there will be many people in hell who were a member in an Evangelical church, professed the name of Christ, walked along what they thought was the right road - but they were on the broad road. Many people who did many great things for Christ, and even in the power of the name of Christ, but they will lift up their eyes in hell - why? Because they didn't have a true righteous relationship with Christ in their life, they didn't really know Him! Oh, we're saved by grace through faith, of course, and not of works - we all know that, and you don't get to heaven through obedience - but I'll tell you this: you don't get to heaven without obedience! It mightn't get you in, but the Bible teaches that without holiness no man shall see the Lord!

Listen, as we close, to what D.A. Carson says, and I think he's right: 'It is true that men are saved by God's grace through faith in Christ, but it is equally true that God's grace in a man's life inevitably results in obedience. Any other view of grace cheapens grace, and turns it into something unrecognisable. Cheap grace preaches forgiveness without repentance, church membership without rigorous church discipline, discipleship without obedience, blessing without persecution, joy without righteousness, results without obedience. In the entire history of the church has there ever been another generation with so many nominal Christians and so few real obedient ones?'

So what is your life? Is it a false profession, or is it a true possession? The 'Didache', that book I quoted last week, that first century book of Christian doctrine and practice, says this: 'But not everyone who seems to speak in the Spirit is a prophet, except he have the behaviour of the Lord'. Do we have the behaviour of the Lord? If not, I urge you today: make your calling and election sure.

Let me just say to all the 'heresy police' that I believe and we believe in eternal security - once saved and always saved - but what we also believe in is the perseverance of the saints. We believe that one can backslide, we believe that you can grow cold, we believe that there such thing as Christian carnality like the Corinthians, but we also believe that we should not continue in sin that grace may abound. We believe that he that nameth the name of Christ ought to depart from iniquity, and that all those who will enter into the kingdom of God will be those who do 'the will of my Father in heaven'. Does your life weigh up, my friend, with all the talk and all the claims? What do you say about Christ, and what will He, one day, say about you?

Father, we pray that You will uncover those who are in a false, deceived assurance that is not of Thy Spirit but is the blindness of the devil himself. Lord, we don't want any children of believers under an assumption that they're alright because they professed faith but there's no genuine life of God in their experience. We don't want people who are a member of churches - whether it's the Iron Hall, or wherever - to think, because of their vain tradition, or their form of godliness, that it proves that they're God's in Christ. Lord, take the lie and damn it today, we pray, and bring the truth of the life of the light of the Gospel into people's lives, and make them new creatures in Christ Jesus - that the old will pass, and all things will become new. Make people sure in their faith today, and if they need to make a fresh resolution by faith, may they do it, and may they be sure. For it's in Christ's name we pray, Amen.

The Sermon On The Mount - Chapter 27

"Building For Eternity"

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by Pastor David Legge
Matthew 7:24-29

'**B**uilding for Eternity' - Mark Twain, you will know him as the author of Tom Sawyer's books and so on, on one occasion he encountered a ruthless businessman from the town of Boston on his travels. He found that this ruthless businessman continually boasted that nobody ever got in his way, and once he had determined to do something - well, everybody was just wiped out of his path. This wealthy businessman said these words: 'Before I die I mean to make a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, and I'm going to climb Mount Sinai, and when I'm up there I'm going to read the Ten Commandments aloud at the top of my voice!'. Unimpressed, Twain responded: 'I've got a better idea: stay in Boston and live by them'.

The Lord has asked us in this Sermon, and especially in the conclusion that we're reading together today, not just to be professors of a religious form, not just to stand up from high heights and profess what we believe in spiritual things, but be doers of the same. Have the word of God, read the word of God, study the word of God, preach and talk about the word of God, but only those - the Lord Jesus says - who do the will of My Father in heaven will inherit the kingdom of heaven. Now, to just make us absolutely sure if we couldn't be already of the theme and the purpose of this Sermon, the Lord brings a parable at the very end of this conclusion. Like many preachers He ends his message with an illustration, if you like, and here we have it. Telling us that we need not just to be professors, but we need to be possessors of the life of God which is manifest and evidenced in a life of true obedient righteousness.

Look down at this parable again, He tells us of the first man who is a hearer and a doer of the word. He likens him to a wise man who built his house upon a rock, and when the storm came the house stood firm because the house was built upon the rock. Then He tells us about a contrasting man who is a hearer also of the word, but he is not a doer, he is a hearer only. Our Lord likens him to a foolish man who builds his house upon the sand, and the storms come and the house falls, and the Lord says: great is the fall of it. Guy King, who is a commentator in the Scriptures and has an excellent book on the Sermon on the Mount, a bit like John Bunyan in Pilgrim's Progress, likens the Christian walk to an ordinary walk in the countryside. The Christian is walking along and he finds a little gate, he passes the small gate and then he goes back on his tracks and decides that he will enter that gate. But Guy King makes the remark saying: 'Of course a gate always leads to somewhere, a gate is never an end in itself. It may be the beginning of an end of sinfulness and worldliness, but it is yet an entrance into a path. It may be the end of the old life, and we have to leave all our sin and iniquity behind us and forsake it, but it is also the beginning of a new life'.

We found in verse 13 the entrance onto that life, that narrow constricted gate, and that narrow constricted way. So the gate is an entrance, but it is an entrance that leads onto a path, the narrow way - and that path leads to an edifice. The gate is not an end to itself, but it leads onto the road; and the road is not an end unto itself, but it leads to a great house. But the Lord is telling us in this parable, and indeed in this Sermon, is that you cannot enter the gate and not be on the road; you cannot be on the road and not enter into the house - the entrance leads to the edifice eventually. The gate is not an end in itself, it may be the end of the old life, but it has to be the beginning of the new life - and you cannot build this house without entering the gate and without walking on the road.

So what the Lord is telling us right throughout this Sermon, and indeed in this end illustration and parable, is: we are irrevocably obliged to build this house. If we have entered through the gate, if we believe ourselves to

be on the narrow constricted way of righteousness, we are irrevocably obliged to build this house - you can't get out of building it! Let me say this: the Bible knows nothing, as far as I can tell reading it and studying it, and the more I study it and read it I find this to be more true, the Bible knows nothing of people who just get saved from hell. I don't find that anywhere - I know of men who have deathbed conversions, and we can all look at the thief on the cross and see that, but we must believe that there was a change wrought in his life, and if he had time to live after that event on the cross he would have manifested the change in a godly, righteous, holy life. In fact the word 'saved', and the word 'salvation', in the Bible I would believe, in the New Testament especially, primarily refers not to being saved from hell, but being saved from the world! Delivered from the world system and all the corruption that is in it, of course that eventually leads to hell, but the Bible teaches us that if we enter through the gate, if we're on the narrow way, that inevitably there will be a house, a building built. This parable teaches us that the building the Lord speaks of is a building of obedience to Christ's words. This house is a building of obedience to Christ's words, and therefore if it's a building of obedience it must be built on a solid rock, and we find that the Lord says: 'That rock is My word itself'.

The house is obedience to Christ's word, and it is built, of course, upon the word of Christ. So what I want to say to you in our concluding message today is very simple, and it's what our Lord is telling in this parable. The first thing is this: you have a house to build, you have a house to build. Now there are five things that we're told about this house in this parable, if you like, and right throughout the whole Bible. I've likened it to the blueprint, the specification, the hardware, the cost, and the contractor. If you look first of all at the blueprint you see within the word of God, especially in 1 Peter 2 verses 21 and 22, the Lord Jesus is given to us not only as a Saviour, but He leaves us an example: 'that ye should follow his steps: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth'.

I hope that over these weeks studying the Sermon on the Mount you have realised, as we've looked at all the things the Lord has taught, that He Himself as the preacher - as this new lawgiver, if you like - is a perfect, complete and absolute illustration of His own teaching. Have you seen that? Apart from those aspects that relate to repentance and failure in sin, in every other aspect of holiness and righteousness our Lord Himself, who is teaching these truths, is the exact epitome and fulfilment and illustration of everything that we find. 'Blessed are the meek', is there anyone more meek than our Lord Jesus Christ? 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God', and there is our Lord Jesus Christ who was separate from sinners, pure and absolutely undefiled. 'Blessed are the peacemakers', and our Lord Jesus is said to be in the New Testament the great Peacemaker, the One who has brought reconciliation between us and God. He is the Light of the world, we are told to be a light set on a hill. We are told to be the salt of the earth, but how could He not be the greatest Salt that has come into humanity and purged out its depravity and sinfulness through His death on the cross? We're told to love your neighbour as yourself, and we see Him on the cross praying: 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do'. We find even in our own salvation that before we were saved we were enemies to God, Romans 5:10: 'When we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son'. He instructed us to pray to our heavenly Father in secret, and as we go through the gospel records we do not find another who prayed more than our Saviour, spending nights on the mountaintop in prayer before His heavenly Father. He tells us: 'Be not anxious', and we find in His life - right throughout all the trial and turmoil and persecution that He underwent - that there was no other that had such a perfect rest and dependence upon His heavenly Father than our Lord.

Then I come to this objection again that I have analysed week after week after week again, for there are people - even yet - who say that this Sermon isn't for Christians today. Well, I don't know what Bible you're reading, but I know this: that within this Sermon all that you find is pure Christlikeness. Surely you're not telling me today that, as followers of Jesus Christ today, we are not to follow Jesus Christ today, by the Spirit's help we're not try and emulate His example? And what greater example do we have in all the Scriptures than the Sermon on the Mount? These men, I believe, do seriously err not knowing the Scriptures.

One verse that settles this whole matter categorically for me, and I believe for any questioners, is this - 1 John 2 verse 6: 'He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked'.

What a blueprint we have of the life of godliness in Christ in this Sermon. That is the building that we are to build, that's the blueprint for it, the words that the Lord has given to us. But secondly there's a specification within it: God, when He directed Moses in the book of Exodus to build the tabernacle, said to him these words: 'See that ye make all things according to the patterns showed to thee in the Mount'. God could well say to us, after looking into this Sermon: 'See that you build your life and this building in every specification showed to you in the Sermon on the Mount'. We're not just to be Bible-lovers, we are to be Bible-livers. The spec of our godly life is outlined in this Sermon, and we ought to build according to everything that God has given to us.

There's a blueprint, there's a specification, and thirdly there is the hardware given - the materials that we're to use, we've found as we went through this Sermon, are acts of righteousness. Let your acts of righteousness be greater acts of righteousness than the righteousnesses of the Pharisees and the Scribes. True righteousness, practical Christianity and holiness - and He's gone through actions, words and thoughts, and all sorts of motivations within this great Sermon. The question we need to ask ourselves today, at the end of it all, is: what are we building with? The building that we have, that we say is our Christian testimony and profession, what is it made up of? Is it just made up of doctrines, traditions, rituals, habits? Or is it made up of these acts of positive righteousness - not just negative things, what we don't do, but what we do do that is a manifestation of God's life in us?

Fourthly there is a cost. You all know that you can't build something for nothing, and this building of God that's built on the truth of Christ costs everything. The Master Builder has stipulated right throughout this Sermon that the Master Builder's account is always a full payment, you can't pay half-price with regards to this Christian life - it is a full surrender, for no man can serve two masters or serve two builders. We must give ourselves absolutely, unreservedly to Him.

There's a blueprint, a specification, the hardware, the cost, and finally the contractor. Although it is us that is said to build this building, this house, you know that if people say to you usually: 'I'm building a house', you'll realise that they themselves probably aren't building it with their own hands - they've employed a contractor or a builder. In the Bible we find these words, Philippians 1 verse 6: 'He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ'. You didn't start the work of this house yourself, it was started through grace in your salvation, and neither will you continue it or finish it. The Sermon on the Mount, although it is the truth of God, is not the whole council of God - we could say that it is the 'what' of the Christian life: what your Christian life ought to be, but it is certainly not the 'how' of the Christian life: how you're saved, how you go on, and how you will finish. But one thing's for sure: all these precepts and principles and instructions in the Sermon on the Mount can only be executed through the power of the Holy Spirit, the power of God, the grace of God, and the enablement of God - for it is God which worketh in you, both to will and to do of His good pleasure.

God is the builder. You have a house to build, God has given you His blueprint, the Lord Jesus Christ - His illustration, His life. The specifications are all outlined to do it according to this Sermon. The hardware of acts of righteousness are to be what we use to build this house. The cost is absolute, we've to give everything. And we are to trust ourselves to the Great Master Builder, God Himself, and the Lord Jesus Christ, and His blessed Holy Spirit. Now, here's the point: you have a duty to build - to build! Not just to know how to read the plans; not just to understand the specifications; to be able to measure and to convert all the specifications into reality; you're not to be just able to discern between what is good and bad materials to build with, what we've been doing all these weeks; you're not to be able just to get your spiritual calculator out and be able to evaluate the cost and talk about the cost, and try to encourage others to pay the cost - you've got to start building!

Don't just read the plans, use them to build! Don't just play with the figures of the measurements, but measure the things, dig the holes, cut the wood, construct the building! Don't just discern good materials from bad, but the Lord is saying that you've got to use the good material, put it into your building and don't just calculate the cost and discuss it and negotiate a lower price - pay it in full, for Christ demands that we build, and the true building in this parable is nothing but obedience to the word of Christ. Not just hearing, but hearers and doers of the word!

So, at the end of these studies in the Sermon on the Mount you've got a house to build: are you going to build it? Secondly you have a foundation to build on, for we find that the wise man built his house on the rock - it doesn't say 'a rock', it's better 'the rock'. The foolish man built his house on 'the sand'. The definite article there is not specifically to signify 'the Lord' or anything like that - although it may be interpreted that way - but more particularly for the people in this environment, in Palestine, when it says 'the rock' and 'the sand' it's peculiar to them. In other words, the rock that they knew and the sand around them that they knew.

We tend to imagine this scene and conjure up that there was this rocky area on the left-hand side, and there was this sandy area of land on the right-hand side - and the builders each chose according to their preference. I believe that is far too simplistic, and in fact loses some of the impact of the truth behind this parable - I'll tell you why. The geology of the area where the Lord was preaching on this particular Mount, the geology of the area was the first stratum of the ground, the top surface, the top layer that everybody could see, was a layer of sand. Underneath the first stratum was the second stratum, the second layer, which we're led to believe was made of rock.

Now we might be excused in a casual reading, thinking: 'Now this foolish man certainly was foolish, how could anybody be so foolish to build on sand? Surely he would know that when the storm came his whole house would be wiped away?'. But the point is this: the foolish man thought that the sand was good ground, the foolish man - as far as he was concerned - could see that the sand was hard, it was safe ground to build on. At the time the Lord delivered this Sermon we know that it was the height of the summertime, and the soil and the sand would have been hard, it would almost have been like iron, like rock and stone! So it's not the case that there was one bit of rock here and one bit of sand here, but there are two layers of ground, there's sand on top and then there's rock below - but the foolish man believes: 'Well, it's enough to just build on the soil and the sand that is baked hard'. It appeared good, and you know how we have gone through this Sermon and we've seen how we've got to beware of appearances, externalities. We can't just judge by an outward appearance of ritualistic righteousness, but there has to be a deep, holy relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ.

We all know how the story went: the rain came, the floods came, the wind came, and the foundations dissolved! The rain dissolved them! What appeared to be good ground was absolutely decimated, and the house fell. Incidentally, the house on the sand may have looked better than the house on the rock. Also, the house on the sand may have looked better for the fact that there was more money spent on the house, because that builder didn't have to dig down deep for rock foundations. It may have been more luxurious, but what we've got to see today is that fundamentally, in the depths and bowels of that house it was flawed.

The big question is this: what should the man that built on the sand have done? Most people think: 'Well, he should have moved to the rocky ground, he should have moved round the corner to the avenue where all the houses are built on the rock'. Well, that is wrong: because the rock was under him! The rock was underneath the sand, but he was satisfied to live on the sand, hard though it may be, but if he had dug deep enough he would have got to the rock. Now this is the very point that the Lord is making: he should have dug deeper until he hit the rock, and then built on it! Now I know that there are some of you think I make these things up as I go along these Sunday mornings, and they're all fairy tales coming out of David Legge's head and study.

But if you turn with me to Luke's gospel chapter 6, you find this same story, and this proves that this was what the Lord was teaching. Luke chapter 6 and verse 48, verse 47: 'Whosoever cometh to me, and heareth my sayings, and doeth them, I will show you to whom he is like: He is like a man which built an house, and digged deep', not moved it, 'digged deep and laid the foundation on a rock: and when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently upon that house, and could not shake it: for it was founded upon a rock' - it was dug deep.

Now my question, obviously, to you today at the end of the Sermon on the Mount, knowing the point that the Lord is making in this parable, is this: if you're a shallow Christian, you're in big trouble! Have you got it? If you profess the name of Christ, but you have a shallow spiritual experience, you need to beware! My next question is: what is the rock? Of course Christ is the rock Himself, Paul said: 'Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ'. We know from Matthew's gospel chapter 16, the conversation between Peter and the Lord Jesus, that Christ - and indeed the confession of Peter concerning Christ - upon this Rock He would build the church. Peter was the stone, but on this Rock - Christ, and the confession that He was the Son of the Living God - the church would be built. 'On Christ the solid Rock I stand', we've just sung - but do you know something? In the context of this particular parable in Matthew chapter 7, specifically the rock is not the person of Christ, but the words of Christ. The Lord says that Himself, verse 24: 'Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them' - it is obedience to Christ's words. The house that you're meant to build is obedience, but that obedience is according to the rock, these sayings of Mine.

Now note: it doesn't say those who quote My sayings, those who hear My sayings, but those who do My sayings. Now I'm going to finish this Sermon today, I'm determined to - for your sake as well as mine! We've got to move on to other things, but let me say this: there has never been a text that could be more applied to the Christian church today, and condemn evangelicalism, than this particular one - particularly fundamental evangelicalism. Those who know the truth, love the truth, talk about the truth, but are not walking in the truth. A generation of sermon tasters and debaters of theological tweedle-dees and tweedle-dums, Christian infants who amuse themselves in their church playpens debating over theological 'i's dotted and 't's crossed. We need to realise that there's more to it than that! As Vance Havner said: 'Our Lord bade us go not merely to teach them all things whatsoever I have commanded you, but to teach them to observe all things that I had commanded you. You have not really learned a commandment until you have obeyed it' - and he goes on to say this remarkable statement - 'The church suffers today from Christians who know volumes more than they practice'!

The rock here, primarily, is a life of continual obedience to the word of God, built on the words of Christ. Now, people - [shaking hands at] the door is a very interesting experience for me at times - but people throughout this series particularly have commented to me: 'These are awfully high standards you're preaching every Sunday morning. You're hard on us'. I would remind you that it's not my Sermon, it's the Lord's Sermon. But others say: 'No-one really lives up to the Sermon on the Mount today, how could you expect people in this world to live like this - none of us are perfect'. Of course none of us can live up to this standard in the sense of perfection, because the Lord Himself is only that! But the point of it all is this: if you are living a so-called Christian life to low standards, if you completely disregard the righteousness that is found in the Sermon on the Mount, if you don't have any trace or any semblance to the precepts that are given to us here, if you're not striving to be perfect even as your heavenly Father is perfect, you're building on sand! That's what the Lord teaches, and I'm not going to water it down for any of you! He teaches that, and if you're not living with that aspiration and that goal, I would wonder whether you're saved at all!

The parable teaches us that one thing is coming that will prove what our lives are really built on, and that is the storms. Let's look thirdly and finally: you have to build a house, and you have a foundation to build on - the words of Christ - but thirdly you have a storm to build for. The Greek says that 'the rain and the floods

and the wind' came - in other words, the wind, the rain, and the floods the people were used to in Palestine, but also there's a directional thing here because the rain comes from above, the floods come from beneath, and the wind comes across. What the Lord is saying here is that it's coming from every direction, the trial and tribulation and problems. So these winds, in winter time now the Lord is talking about, that these people would have been used to would have brought heavy sudden storms. The rainclouds would have driven over from the Mediterranean, they would have turned that bone dry ground that had been calloused during the summer seasons into a wet, marshy, boggy sand - like a quicksand. The dry riverbeds would have flooded into raging torrents, pouring down the valleys and overflowing the banks, bulldozing buildings and anything else before it that came in front of it.

During this event houses would have had to weather the storm, and if they weren't built on that second stratum layer of rock they would have been decimated. Now, another question - we've asked what is the rock, we've asked what is the house, and now we're asking: what are the storms? Of course many people and preachers apply these to life's difficulties - and there's no doubt about it, that we need to stand on the rock when life's difficulties come: temptation, sorrow, poverty, pain, persecution. If your life is not built on obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ you will find, when the hardships come, that your life will be decimated, you'll buckle underneath the problems. Young people who have compromised inwardly - they might be coming to church, might be reading the Bible even - but when they go to university, how many times do we see that their life caves in because there wasn't that internal obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ.

There are many people, many people, who are very vocal in their faith - but when sorrow and trouble comes they go to pieces because it was an outward conformity, but not an inward reality, and obedience and a righteousness. It's a bit like the parable of the sower. The Lord said: 'He also that receiveth seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word, and the care of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful'. But John says, 1 John 2 verse 17: 'And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever'. We all need to beware of those who are extremely vocal and opinionated in their so-called Christianity, but there is no real tangible righteousness, internal holiness in their life. I say to you today: beware it's not you. Beware, because these people believe that they are saved, they believe that everything is right in their life. A false builder is not a man who denies God and God's truth, he's not a man necessarily that lives an overtly immoral life, but he is a man who names the name of Christ but does not have a vital obedience.

Obedience! If anything is told in the Sermon on the Mount and in this parable it is that obedience is the evidence of true faith, and not a professional building or having a building! Faith without works is dead. James, the half-brother of our Lord, said - a plain allusion to these words of Christ. You can see in this parable that these two men had much in common: they both had a desire to build houses, and both houses looked sturdy and looked impressive and good - but the externals didn't matter, all that mattered was the foundation. This is what this parable is saying above all: professing Christian, one who is naming and claiming the lordship of Christ, there is a day coming when all of our professions will be tested! All of them! Now, we ought not to read the distinction of judgements that we find later on in the New Testament epistles, they are of course there and we can read into them in one sense - but these would not have been in the mind of the disciples, the Judgement Seat of Christ and the Great White Throne. But what the Lord is bringing to them, the main point is this: whether now by trials in your life or later on in a judgement, your profession will be proved by Christ Himself - that's the point!

If you're at the Judgement Seat of Christ it will be proved positively, it will be clear that you're His. But if you're at the Great White Throne, it will be proved that it was a false profession - He will say: 'Depart from Me'. Now listen, if you're a backslider here, or if you've confessed Christ as a child and you're still harping back to that, I'm not denying that you could be saved at all - God knows those that are His. I'm saying that according to His word, He says that the evidence that you have to testify to yourself and others is faith in

Christ, a confession of faith, and a life of righteous obedience - so backslider beware! You can't sit, whether in Protestant Ulster or not, saying: 'I was saved when I was a child, I know I'm saved', and you have a life of absolute ungodly idolatry and unholiness!

We can build our lives upon church, upon doctrinal preference, upon dogmatism, upon a hobby horse, we can even build it upon our friends, Christian fashion, emotional experience, religious habits - you name it - but Christ says that the only thing that will weather the storm is the life of a holy, blameless child of God, and that will be proved by Christ Himself. A life of internal righteousness, a life of obedience - don't miss what this parable is pointing out. Let me, as we spend the next few moments closing all this Sermon up, let me ask you and plead with you: don't miss what the whole of this Sermon is about, because in the context we've come in verse 13 from the gate; we've moved into the fruit, the progress - the start at the gate, and then the progress in the fruit - then we've looked at the profession in the building. I showed you how the Lord is coming from the start of the life of faith, to the continuance, the growth of the life of faith, and then He's ending at the finish of the life of faith where it's all proved in judgement - our profession and our building. The Lord is saying above all things, not about the trials and tribulations of life, but there is a storm coming to everyone who names the name of Christ, and it will be a judgement that will discern whether they are true professors or not.

What a storm that will be, to prove false professors from true, they will be judged - as verse 21 says - they will be judged whether their profession is genuine or not by one thing: 'those who do the will of My Father in heaven'. In this parable that is exactly what's being taught, verse 24. What a storm that will be! Do you not believe me? First Timothy 6 verses 17 to 19, listen to this: 'Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; That they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate; Laying up in store for themselves a good foundation' - what for? - 'against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life'. You can explain that away if you like, but I'm not going to. You can be saved and you can be sure of it, and I believe 'once saved always saved', but the way of being sure before the Throne of God is a life of righteousness that has been wrought in your heart through the grace of God and the Holy Spirit of God.

I heard a preacher say recently, and I can honestly say this: there are some so-called Christians, maybe even here, and I wouldn't like to be chained with them when they die. Salvation, we do not rest in our doing, but our safety rests and our assurance in our doing. Now listen, the Lord's conclusion is going to be our conclusion today. In verses 28 and 29: 'And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished: For he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes'. The Scribes taught from authorities, the Lord Jesus taught with authority. He spoke as the divine lawgiver, as the expounder and the final Judge. The hypocritical Jews were shown up, and if we read this Sermon on the Mount and are not astonished like they were, and are not challenged: we're either spiritually dead and blind, or we haven't grasped what it's really teaching. The people recognised the difference between the old Jewish religion and this true Christianity, and we've got to recognise today the difference between hypocritical profession and the real thing! Do you recognise the difference? Christ had to be noticed, and Christ demanded a response then and He still does now. Do you know what is our duty to do at the end of this great Sermon? It is to bow before Christ and submit to His authority, and if we do not we may find in a day to come that because we could not we will be condemned!

The challenge we are left with is an uncomfortable one to most people, but Christ demands that we consider not just what we profess, but whether our profession is based on a genuine relationship with Jesus Christ that issues forth with a true life of discipline and holiness. Professor, one who professes Christ, are you really saved? Salvation is, of course, based on what Christ has done for us, but the positive proof of it in the life is the change that His work at the cross has done and wrought in you - that is the proof. The great question

today is this: in a court of law, could you be convicted by the precepts of the Sermon on the Mount of being a Christian in this age? My greatest fear deduced from these sermons and the privilege of studying them in these weeks is that there will be many people in hell who made Christian professions; who came to prayer meetings; who broke bread; who made external and verbal conformity to a form of godliness, but never knew the power, never knew the Christ, never knew a true, inward, positive obedience - never knew the Lord. I warn you: if all you're sitting in this morning is a profession, flee from the wrath to come.

Let me just say that I have some booklets for those who are not sure whether they're saved or not, you've got to be sure. Make your calling and election sure today all of you, for we're all instructed to do that. Why not speak to me this morning, if you feel that you haven't really trusted Christ at all and there's no evidence in your life?

Let us pray: Father, we have been instructed over these weeks to make our eye single, to serve one Master, to seek first the kingdom. Father, we know that from these studies, we thank Thee for them, but we know this: where our treasure is there our heart will be also. Lord, be our treasure, take our lives, and make them what You want them to be, in all holiness and godly conversation - for Christ's sake, Amen.

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